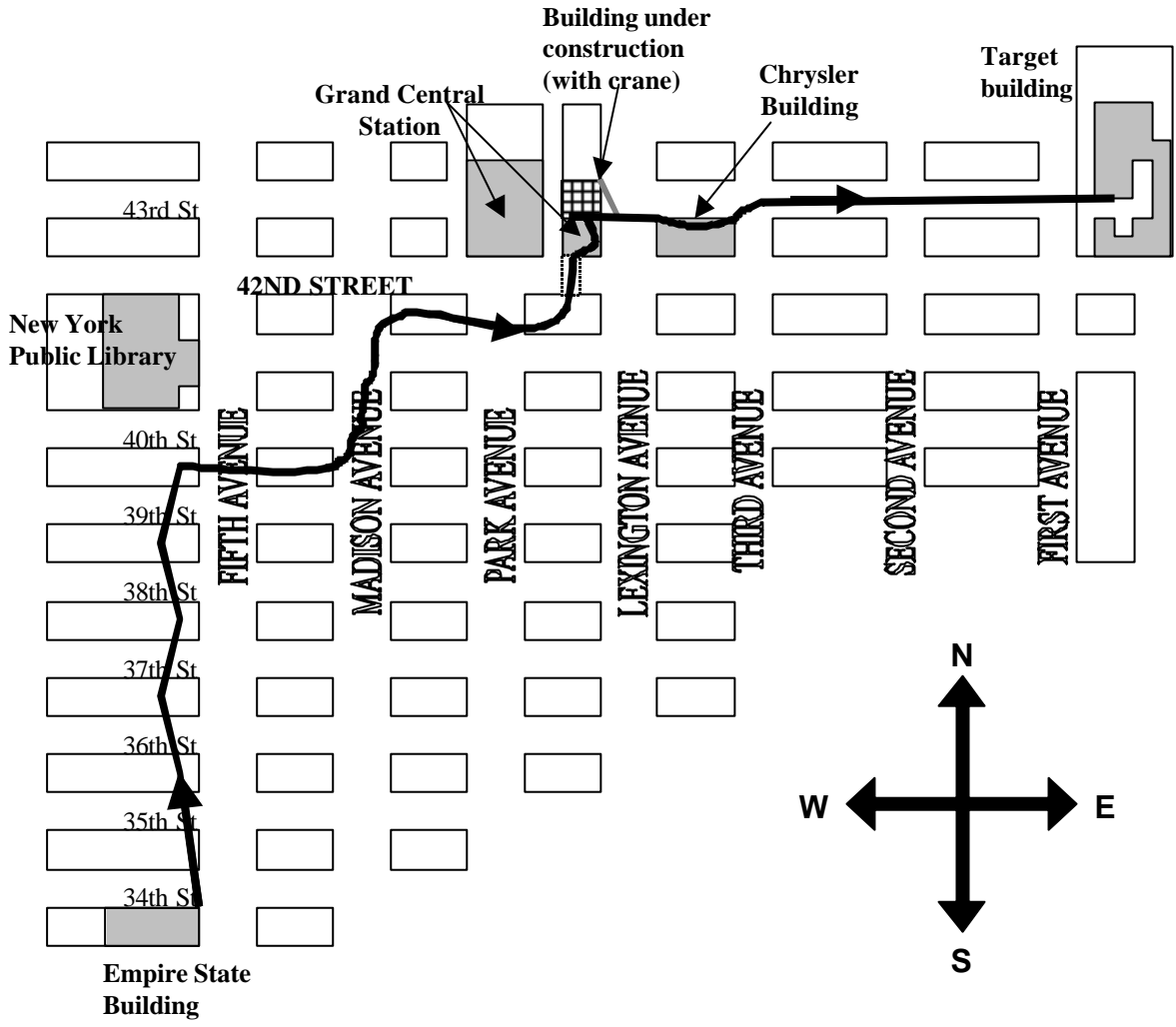


MIDTOWN -- NEW YORK CITY
THE ESCAPE ROUTE



ALTITUDE RUSH

by Matthew Reilly

Empire State Building

100th Floor

New York City, 6:50 a.m.

There came a shrill electronic *beep* as the masked intruder removed the small rectangular case from its recess beneath the desk's clear-glass top—and suddenly the clock was ticking.

Twenty-five minutes.

The response team would be here in four.

The intruder wasted no time.

As he strode toward the office's corner windows, he slid the rectangular glass case into a small chest-pack hidden underneath the front of his black jacket.

He came to the north-east-facing windows, where he was met by a view of midtown New York City.

It looked like a mountain range of skyscrapers—all cluttered and crowded. He saw the top of the Chrysler Building, its crystalline pointed peak shimmering in the dawn. The iron-lattice Queensboro Bridge and the wide expanse of the East River hovered in the background beyond the Chrysler. In the concrete jungle *in between* the river and the Empire State, the keen tourist would find Grand Central Station, fashionable Fifth Avenue, and on the banks of the River itself, the UN building.

Nice view, the intruder thought. As one would expect of a member of the US Federal Reserve Board.

The intruder, however, didn't stop to admire it.

He just drew a silenced Sig-Sauer pistol from his thigh holster and blasted one of the corner windows to smithereens. Then—100 storeys up, 1000 feet off the ground—he leapt out through the hole and the chase began.

OFFICIAL STAMP 046-24 -- DOCUMENT NOT DELIVERED (7
DECEMBER, 1941) -- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL COPIES
-- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL

6 December, 1941

Dear Herr Hitler,

AERIAL RUN

The flying fox was waiting for the intruder outside the blasted-open window.

After the man—his call-sign for this mission was, appropriately, Robin Hood—had entered the plush office via an elevator shaft inside the Empire State Building, he had attached a radio transponder to the ceiling over by its corner windows.

It was a homing transponder.

Sending a signal to his companion—call-sign Little John—over on the flat-topped roof of Horwicks Tower, an ordinary-looking 45-storey building two blocks to the north.

The rope that now connected the two buildings was very, very steep.

As he'd taken the rectangular case from the desk, Hood had heard a loud *whump!*—the sound of a rocket-propelled concrete-piercing hook slamming into the thick concrete beam above the corner window. Attached to the hook was a rope; attached to the rope was a state-of-the-art flying fox.

Robin Hood grabbed the flying fox's handlebar-like grips and slid like a rocket down its steeply-slanted zip-line, soaring clear over 34th and 35th Streets and the low city block in between.

As he approached the roof of Horwicks Tower, Hood applied the handbrakes on the fox and it slowed, bringing him to a sharp swinging halt a couple of feet above the tower's roof.

Little John was waiting for him.

True to his namesake, he towered over Robin Hood. Whereas Hood was small and wiry and compact, Little John was big and barrel-chested and strong. At the moment his bushy black beard was covered by a black ski-mask.

'Thirty-eight seconds,' he said as soon as Hood landed. 'I thought you'd be faster.'

Hood said, 'Sorry, but I didn't want to break my legs on the landing.'

Little John was already hustling toward the other side of the roof. Hood took off after him. Rooftop wind whistled around them as they jogged.

'The Americans are on their way and they're really *really* pissed,' Little John said. 'Their radio networks went berserk as soon as you lifted the pressure case from the desk. They're sending three teams from the *George Wahington*. ETA: two-and-a-half minutes.' He turned to Hood meaningfully. 'SEAL teams.'

'Oh, shit.'

'That's what I said. Aren't we supposed to be doing exercises with them next week?'

‘Yep,’ Hood said, ‘which means the Yanks are *not* going to be happy if they catch us today. And what’s this about two-and-a-half minutes? I thought we had a four-minute lead time.’

‘Intelligence fucked up,’ Little John scowled as he ran. ‘The *Washington* is in Dock 7 for the weekend, not Dock 46. They’re closer.’

They came to the parapet. The roof of another similarly-sized building sat across 36th Street from them.

Little John threw a pair of handheld suction cups to Hood. ‘Just in case you turn into an unidentified falling object.’

It was then that Hood saw that John had already connected these two rooftops with another flying fox.

Little John turned to face him. ‘So, my friend. You ready to get vertical?’

NOT YOUR AVERAGE DOCUMENT CASE

Hood and Little John’s rather irregular form of movement was governed by the pressure case they had stolen from the Empire State Building.

Constructed of superstrong Lexan glass and about the size of a slim laptop computer, the case was manufactured by the WR Grauss Company of Switzerland, and it was unique.

Novelty, however, comes at a price. And with starting prices of \$6 million for its custom-designed document containers, the Grauss Company of Switzerland has a rather elite clientele.

Their cases are known to be used by the US and British governments, nearly every major office at the UN, and not a few billionaires who like to accumulate socially... *unacceptable*...collectibles.

There are two reasons why.

Firstly, Grauss pressure cases are all but impossible to break open. They are protected by four pressure-sealed locks which can only be opened using a high-pressure air-valve release unit—a machine the size of a small refrigerator. Such machines are rare and very expensive.

The second reason, however, is far more intriguing.

You see, Grauss cases are capable of destroying their contents should they fall into the wrong hands.

If a Grauss case is taken too far—or for too long—from its resting place, a small amount of highly corrosive hydrofluoric acid will be released into it, destroying the document that it contains.

Collectors of Nazi memorabilia are known to house them in Grauss cases. US embassy employees carry highly classified messages in them. UN ambassadors are known to use them to safeguard sensitive documents from foreign theft.

Truth be told, the Grauss case that Hood and Little John had stolen held a document—a very old document, written in 1941. And, indeed, as he'd taken the case from its home inside the Federal Reserve member's desk, Robin Hood had beheld the document inside it—and even he had gasped at its contents.

'Jesus...'

The case, however, came with a singular feature, unique even by the Grauss Company's high standards.

Because of its home inside the Empire State Building, this case had an altitude sensor.

A two-way altitude sensor.

If the case detected that it was either *higher* than 1000 feet—the height of the Empire State—its acid-dissolution system would be triggered. Similarly, if the sensor detected that the case was *lower* than ten feet off the ground, the acid would also be released.

Which meant any would-be thief had to stay both out of the air *and* off the ground.

As such, the document's owner—a smug proud man who liked the idea of owning a document that could rock the world to its very foundations—lived safe in the knowledge that if anyone stole his precious piece of memorabilia, they could never use it against his country. It would be destroyed as soon as it left the building.

He'd only made one wrong assumption.

The thief who went neither up nor down.

It is with grave feelings that I write to you today.

Despite our differences, our two great nations are in many ways, very similar. Ours are proud nations, strong nations.

In any event, the case had a failsafe mechanism.

When it was removed from its resting place—after all, its owner liked to show the document to visitors every so often; as he had done recently to a diplomat from Hood's home country—a timer mechanism was activated, giving the owner twenty-five minutes to return the case to its slot.

That was the twenty-five-minute limit Robin Hood knew of.

The time he had to get the case to a high-pressure lock-release valve.

The only problem: he had to traverse 16 city blocks to get to a place with a release valve, while staying off the ground.

RUN, RUN, RUN, AS FAST AS YOU CAN

While the rest of New York awoke to the usual morning news—everybody, it seemed, still hated America: African warlords did; the British did, over America’s refusal to share its oil reserves with petrol-starved England; there was even a cute little protest in Washington by a dozen middle-economy countries like Singapore, India, Sweden and Australia, protesting against America’s tendency to protect its home market with high import tariffs—Robin Hood and Little John made their aerial run across New York City.

Two blocks in thirty-eight seconds was a good start.

The next three went equally quickly because Little John had prepared well.

More flying foxes were already in place, allowing them to run across the building tops and just whiz down on each fox to the next roof.

It also helped that in this part of their journey, each of the buildings was progressively shorter than the last—it was downhill sliding. That was good. Later, they would have to travel ‘uphill’, and then things would be different.

They pushed on—following Fifth Avenue northward, crossing the chasms of 37th, 38th and 39th Streets—moving fast.

Between 39th and 40th, they had to cut right. Ahead of them to the north was the New York Public Library and it was too low and irregularly-shaped to traverse.

Besides, they had to head eastward anyway, which meant crossing the imposing chasm of Fifth Avenue itself.

Little John had pre-laid another flying fox. Its rope soared across Fifth like a long swooping power cable, anchored to the roof of the HSBC Building on the other side.

Hood grabbed the flying fox—

—and then he heard it.

An ominous *thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump*.

Both he and Little John turned, and saw them.

‘They’re here,’ Little John said.

They saw three helicopters thundering down the skyscraper-lined canyonway of Fifth Avenue, booming over the early morning traffic.

They were SH-60B Seahawks. Troop carriers. Flying with their noses down and their asses up. Twelve men per chopper. Thirty-six troops.

Mean motherfuckers all.

‘Now it gets interesting,’ Hood said as he and Little John kicked off the rooftop and slid in tandem across busy Fifth Avenue, the three Navy helicopters roaring down the glass-walled canyon toward them, bearing down upon them like angry birds of prey.

CHANGE OF PLANS

Robin Hood and Little John hit the roof of the HSBC Building running.

They saw the uneven rooftop landscape spread out before them, the diagonal north-eastern route that they had to traverse in order to get to their destination—a building over on 1st Avenue that backed onto the East River.

Several landmarks stood out: the Chrysler Building and below it, Grand Central Station, both on 42nd Street; plus a building behind Grand Central that was under construction.

A flying fox lay stretched across Madison Avenue on the opposite side of the HSBC Building's roof, waiting for them.

And then the choppers arrived.

They came thumping by overhead, rising up behind the two thieves from the chasm that was Fifth Avenue, showing their sides, revealing armed men seated in their open doorways, guns up and firing.

The roof all around Robin Hood and Little John erupted with bullet impacts, cutting them off from the escape fox on the other side.

Hood and John ran.

Two more lines of bullet holes chased them across the rooftop, catching up to them just as they arrived at a small shack that housed the building's internal stairwell, threw open the door and dived inside, rolling down the stairs an instant before as the shack's thin plywood walls were ripped to shreds by the chainsaw-like bombardment of the SEALs' gunfire.

Hood and Little John were on their feet in seconds, racing down the stairwell.

At the same time, the first chopper landed on the roof, disgorging a team of twelve Navy SEALs from its side doors.

The other two choppers split up—one heading north, covering 40th Street; the other heading east, covering the eastward run over Madison Avenue.

The choppers knew where they were going.

In times such as these, my country, like yours, has concerns about the future – about current alliances, and of course, the Soviet issue.

CROSSING MADISON AVENUE

Hood and Little John bolted down the stairwell, taking the stairs four-at-a-time, swinging around every turn, moving as fast as their legs could carry them.

As they ran, they took off their combat jackets and ski-masks—revealing bulky woolen jumpers and regular trousers. If they ran into someone now, it was better not to look like a terrorist.

They were nine floors down when they heard the SEALs' rapid footfalls booming down the stairwell above them.

'Damn it, *shit!*' Little John yelled. 'They got here too fast! What do we do now?'

'We improvise,' Robin Hood said. 'Where can we pick up the trail again?'

'If you can get us to Grand Central, we'll be back on the escape route.'

'Grand Central it is then.'

They came to the second floor of the building—a bare twenty feet off the ground—and headed east, toward Madison Avenue, hurrying through an empty office area.

They came to the eastern side of the building, to the line of windows overlooking the north-south-running Madison.

A flat steel awning lay directly outside the windows, cover for the pedestrians on the street below.

Hood stole a glance behind him—no SEALs. *Yet.* They'd be here any second, though.

And so he just drew his Sig-Sauer and loosed two crisp shots, shattering one of the windows, and leapt outside.

The sounds of New York met him—honking horns, the clatter of shop shutters, human murmurs—all of it bouncing off the glass walls of the deep Manhattan canyons.

It was close on 7 a.m. and the morning rush was just kicking in.

Buses streamed northward along Madison like migrating cockroaches, taking up all four of its lanes. Yellow cabs filled in the gaps.

And then Hood heard another sound—from somewhere above and behind them—a familiar *thump-thump-thump-thump-thump*—

It burst around the corner to the south a phenomenal speed, banking hard and fast—a Navy Seahawk.

Coming *right for* him and Little John.

‘*There! Now!*’ Hood yelled, indicating a bus that was about to pull to a halt alongside their awning.

The chopper powered up, leapt forward in the air.

Hood and Little John ran out onto the awning, toward the bus’s moving roof.

There came a sudden bang as they ran—the sound of a door being kicked open.

Then, suddenly, *every* window looking out onto the awning behind them started exploding, sending glass showering outward.

The SEALs were inside the office and firing hard.

‘*Go! Go! Go!*’ Hood yelled, running hard, ducking forward.

He and Little John ran step-for-step along the awning, windows shattering behind them, the chopper roaring above them, before they leapt—together—onto the roof of the bus, just as the long white vehicle lurched forward and continued on its northward journey up Madison.

But it wasn’t over yet.

The chopper above them wanted in on the action. Since it didn't have room to turn on its side, it swooped in low above them, trying to get to the next intersection—Madison and 41st—where it would have room to pivot in mid-air and give the men in its side doors a shot at Hood and Little John.

But the bus—picking up speed now—hit the intersection first and slipped through it, so the chopper had to power up again and head for the next one up at 42nd Street.

Meanwhile, Hood and Little John were busy crossing Madison Avenue itself—*by hopping from one moving bus to another!*

A bare twelve feet off the ground, they jumped from bus to bus, slowly making their way across the four lanes of traffic—two tiny figures moving *above* the morning rush, using full-sized buses as stepping stones.

But they had to move fast, for as they crossed the wide avenue laterally, the forward movement of the traffic was bringing them closer and closer to 42nd Street and the big chopper now hovering in the intersection there, swinging slowly around in the open space...

With one final jump, Hood and Little John landed on the steel pedestrian awning on the eastern side of Madison Avenue, fifteen yards short of the 42nd St intersection.

No sooner had they landed, however, than the chopper swung fully around in the air above the intersection, showing them its side door: a door packed with machinegun-toting Navy SEALs.

The SEALs opened fire, just as Hood raised his own pistol and blasted another window, causing it to spiderweb with cracks, and with Little John rushing along behind him, dived through its cracked glass shards into the safety of yet another New York City building.

UPHILL

Up the stairs they ran.

Hearts pumping. Legs pounding.

It was tough going, but Hood and Little John were fit, very fit. After all, they were their country's finest.

They had to keep pushing eastward, paralleling 42nd Street. They were close to Grand Central Station now, separated from it by only two streets—Park Avenue to the east and 42nd Street itself to the north.

'Damn it,' Little John said as they ran. 'I didn't plan on us coming so far north so soon. Any ideas how we get across Park?'

'Not yet,' Hood said.

They hurried up the stairwell, arrived at the roof, threw open the door, burst out into the early morning sunlight.

Hood hurried over to the parapet overlooking Park Avenue. The building directly across from him was the same height as this one, its walls made of sheer glass; the gap between the two structures maybe sixty feet.

'We got any flying foxes left?' he asked Little John.

'All out, I'm afraid.'

Just then, Hood saw one of the Navy helicopters swoosh by beneath him into Park Avenue. The chopper began to hover in front of Hood's building, only a few floors *below* the rooftop.

It rose slightly in the air. It looked as if the chopper was trying to peer *inside* the windows of the building, trying to get a glimpse of Hood and Little John inside.

As he watched it check out each floor, Hood saw that this chopper's side doors were open but empty—this Seahawk must have already unloaded its troops.

And then Hood got an idea.

He spun, he'd need a—and he saw it: *the building's window washer platform*.

Within a minute, Hood and Little John had opened the guard-gates on the window washer's platform and positioned it on the edge of the rooftop in such a way that it was jutting out perpendicularly from the roof, extending about twenty feet out from the edge, kind of like a springboard.

The chopper beneath them kept rising, searching, searching...

Hood pulled out his suction cups, held one in each hand. Little John did the same.

'You see what I'm thinking?' Hood asked.

'Uh-huh,' Little John said. 'You know you're crazy, don't you?'

'Just take a good run up and stay with me. It's the only way we're going to get across Park.'

The chopper beneath them rose quickly, checking each floor, until at last, it came to roof level.

The Seahawk came level with the extended window washer's platform, rotating laterally as its pilots scanned the area—in the process showing Hood and Little John its open side flank.

Which was just what they wanted.

'*Now!*' Hood yelled.

He and Little John ran, close together, out onto the window washer's platform.

They hit the platform at a run, shot out along its length, their feet clanging on its metal flooring.

And then they jumped...

...out into the clear open sky...

...and landed...

...*inside the hovering Navy helicopter!*

But they didn't stop.

In fact, they didn't miss a single step.

The chopper's two pilots spun around in astonishment—but all they saw were two rushing blurs enter their helicopter's rear troop hold from the left, dash across its width, and then dive out through its open *right*-hand doorway!

Hood and Little John blasted out the right-hand doorway of the Seahawk and threw themselves out into the air like skydivers, arms outstretched, suction cups gripped in their hands.

They both flew through the air...soaring, flying, falling...before—*whack-whack!*—they hit the glass windows of the building on the other side of Park Avenue and engaged their suction cups.

The cups held, and suddenly they were hanging against the outside of this new building!

Two quick gunshots later and they were inside it.

And although, in the past the United States has preferred to remain isolated from conflicts such as the present one, there comes a time when a country must make a decision that will ensure its future, and as such choose its allies based not on past allegiances, but on what is best for the nation in the cold hard light of reality.

INSIDE RUNNING – GRAND CENTRAL STATION

Downhill.

To the second level—because this building possessed a glassed-in pedestrian bridge that spanned 42nd Street and opened onto Grand Central.

They reached the second floor, and cut through a small shopping centre and for the first time that day, encountered people—the earlybirds buying breakfast, donuts, coffee.

They hit the glass-walled pedestrian bridge, raced across it, just as, without warning, the windows on both sides of the bridge shattered violently under the weight of an incoming team of Navy SEALs.

It was as if someone had set off a chain of fireworks on either side of Hood and Little John.

But they just kept on running as the twin lines of windows on their flanks just blasted inwards—*crash!-crash!-crash!*—the star-shaped explosions of glass closely followed by the bodies of black-clad SEALs swinging into the interior of the bridge on drop-ropes.

Robin Hood and Little John swept out of the bridge a split second before the bullets started flying, and entered Grand Central Station.

They charged into the concourse—careful to stay high, up on the mezzanine level—and skirted the main lobby, dodging people, running hard and fast, heading east now.

‘This way!’ Little John called, back on the plan now.

They hit a ‘Staff-Only’ door and burst into a utility stairwell, stormed up it—at the same time as the SEALs hustled across the concourse behind them.

More stairs.

More running.

7:06 became 7:07.

They had until 7:15 am.

They came to the roof, stepped out onto it, and once again found themselves looking at the New York skyline.

Dominating the immediate area was the colossal Chrysler Building. It loomed above them to the east, 77 storeys high, across the wide chasm of Lexington Avenue.

Hood gazed at the top of the Chrysler Building.

That was where they wanted to go, he thought. It was the only building in this area that was high enough to allow for the final leg of their journey...

‘All right, LJ, we don’t have much time,’ he said, breathing hard. ‘You said you had the route figured out from here.’

‘This way,’ Little John said.

Behind Grand Central, a new tower was under construction. It was basically just the shell of a building—all scaffolding, gantry elevators and unfinished concrete floors. It didn’t even have windows yet, so you could see all the way through.

It also—Hood saw—had a crane mounted all the way up on its roof, from which hung an extra-long cable and hook.

Little John, he saw, had already been here. The crane’s cable was stretched out to the west at a steep angle, tied to one of the middle floors of the structure.

They raced for the nearest gantry elevator, stepped inside it and whistled up toward the floor with the crane’s hook tied to it.

The SEALs chasing them must have radioed their companions, because no sooner was the elevator moving than the three Seahawk helicopters arrived on the scene and the whole construction site was pummelled with gunfire.

The elevator came to the 10th floor and Little John flung open its metal grill and led Hood across the exposed concrete floor to the tied-down hook at its edge. No sooner

were they off the elevator, than it headed straight back down to the SEALs down below.

They were coming.

Through the exposed sides of the open-air level, Hood and Little John saw the Navy choppers circling the building, searching for them like bloodhounds. They'd have them in ten seconds...

They came to the crane's hook. The way Little John had secured it, it was ready for a big swing—a long pendulum-like arc that would carry them eastward, alongside their unfinished building's southern side, then *over* Lexington, right up to the steel-and-glass superstructure of the Chrysler Building's tenth or eleventh floor.

'I'll hold the hook,' Little John said, 'you hold me. Just make sure you're ready with a suction cup by the time we reach the Chrysler.'

'Got it,' Robin Hood said.

Little John untied the hook. Hood grabbed the bigger man's belt—while keeping a suction cup gripped in one hand.

Then, without any further ceremony—just as the first SEALs arrived on their level in the gantry elevator—Hood and Little John jumped off the edge of the dusty concrete floor and swung.

THE CHRYSLER

It was a spectacular swing.

Two tiny figures, suspended from a building-mounted crane, flanked by three Navy helicopters, swinging in a beautiful flat arc, high over Lexington Avenue.

They swung fast—swooping downwards, across the face of the ugly unfinished tower—then they shot out into the open air above Lexington, reaching the bottom of their arc...and then they came back up again, up and up and up, zeroing in on the shiny vertical side of the Chrysler Building.

They came to a window, hit it hard—and *stopped*, thanks to the suction cup in Hood's hand, now affixed to the exterior of the great structure.

Within seconds, the adjoining window was broken and they were inside, heading for the nearest elevator.

Bing!

A minute later, the elevator arrived at the 75th floor of the Chrysler Building.

Hood and Little John charged out of the lift, blasted a security lock, stepped into a partitioned office area.

'Jumpers off,' Hood said.

They wrenched off their jumpers as they hustled across the floor, heading for the eastern windows.

The removal of their bulky woollen jumpers revealed small packs on their backs—as well as, in Hood's case, the chest-pack containing the coveted document.

They came to the eastern wall of the building, saw the world beyond it—the tops of buildings, the East River, and right next to the East River, their destination...

'You ready for the rollercoaster ride?' Hood said.

'Are you kidding? This is what I've been waiting for,' Little John said.

'Then let's do it.'

Firing as he ran, Hood blasted the eastern windows to hell and then, without so much as a second thought, he and Little John sped up and launched themselves out through the exploded-open window and plummeted down through the sky.

Although our two nations have traded indirect blows in this burgeoning conflict, the United States is not yet a formal part of this war. Our entry into it, however, need not occur at all.

THE FINAL LEG

The backpacks, of course, held parachutes.

But these were no ordinary parachutes.

Hood and Little John had known the Americans would send choppers. Likewise, they had known that getting to their final target would require at least one parachute jump.

The only problem: parachute's tend to hang in the air a long time.

And so they were using stunt chutes—high-speed, high-performance chutes that dropped fast due to perforations in their canopies, but which also were capable of tight control. After all, they were still three blocks from their target building, which was why the Chrysler had been the only option: it was high enough to allow them to parachute—fast and low, without any hovering—through three blocks of street canyons and onto the roof of their target destination.

The choppers saw them as soon as their twin parachutes blossomed.

And took off in pursuit.

The stunt chutes worked well.

Hood and Little John shot downwards through the air like twin bullets, falling fast but flat, in dead-straight trajectories. They swung around onto 43rd St, banking like race cars, now heading due east.

And for the first time that day, they saw their destination.

It loomed before them at the end of 43rd St, two blocks away—a medium-sized square-shaped building made of glass and grey concrete, with an endless line of fluttering international flags stretched across its top.

The UN Building.

Fronting onto 1st Avenue.

Hood and Little John were losing altitude every second—*fifty storeys...forty-eight...forty-six...*

The choppers swung into the canyon behind them, rotors thumping, the lead helicopter trying to give the SEALs in its side doors a clear shot.

It was going to be close.

The two thieves shot through an intersection, descending quickly, flying fast.

Forty storeys...thirty-eight...

Shooting forward, the windows on either side of the street blurred with motion.

They came to 1st Avenue, blasting out of the chasms of New York City, shooting high over the street, soaring over the wide paved forecourt of the UN's headquarters.

The choppers boomed out of the canyon system a second later, chasing desperately.

But they were too late.

The two parachutes sailed over the top of the UN Building, pulled up sharply, and landed deftly on its roof.

The moment Hood and Little J landed, they jettisoned their stunt chutes and took off at a run, disappearing inside a rooftop elevator shack just as security personnel appeared from the firestairs.

The three choppers lurched to a halt in front of the imposing international structure, stopping in mid-air, their race lost.

The usual bank of TV crews out the front of the building caught sight of the two parachutes, a couple of them actually raising their cameras in time to get footage of the two daredevils.

Hood didn't mind. In fact, it was exactly what he wanted.

It was the nicest touch of all that they had painted some symbols onto their stunt chutes: anti-nuclear slogans berating the French for their continued nuclear testing in the South Pacific.

It was reported on the news that night as just another publicity stunt by guerilla environmentalists.

Once inside the UN Building, Hood and Little John attached clip-on ties to their collars, and assumed the walk of regular bureaucrats.

Owing to the labyrinth of national offices inside the building, the Americans would never know into which mission the two thieves walked—would never know which country's high-pressure release valve was used to open the mysterious Grauss case.

In this vein, Herr Fuhrer, I propose an alliance between our two great nations—between Germany and the United States of America—that will supercede any previous treaties my country may be party to.

I await your reply. In the meantime, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Franklin Delano Roosevelt
President of the United States of America

OFFICIAL STAMP 046-24 -- DOCUMENT NOT DELIVERED (7
DECEMBER, 1941) -- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL COPIES
-- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL COPIES -- DESTROY ALL

THE BENEFITS OF LEVERAGE

Two days after the theft, the President of the United States gave an impromptu press conference during which he announced that tariffs preventing Australian meat products from entering the United States—tariffs which for years had unfairly protected American farmers from open-market competition—would be abolished.

He also issued a statement saying that aggressive US tactics toward the Euro and the European economy would cease. Some economic commentators noted that several currencies that were ‘tied’ to the Euro would benefit immensely from such an action, one of which was the beleaguered Australian dollar.

When questioned about the sudden changes of policy, the President denied that it had been the result of a recent meeting at UN Headquarters with top-level Australian diplomats.

In fact, he said, relations between the two nations were stronger than ever. Why, just next week, US SEAL teams were to engage in exercises with crack troops from the elite Australian SAS...

THE END