

THE  
TITANIC  
SECRET

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THE  
TITANIC  
SECRET

*An Isaac Bell Adventure*



CLIVE  
GUSSLER  
AND  
JACK DU BRUL

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### NEW YORK

DIRK PITT Director of NUMA.

THOMAS GWYNN Attorney for the estate of Isaac Bell.

VIN BLANKENSHIP Secret Service agent.

### COLORADO

ISAAC BELL Detective with the Van Dorn Agency.

JIM PORTER Manager of a Denver post office.

BILLY MCCALLISTER Denver Police.

JACK GAYLORD Denver Police.

BOB NORTHROP Postal investigator.

RUDOLFO LATANG Magician.

HANS BLOESER Banker and co-owner of the Little Angel Mine.

TONY WICKERSHAM Engineer and Bloeser employee.

WILLIAM GIBBS Reporter.

COLIN RHODES Van Dorn agent.

GREGGORY PATMORE U.S. Army Intelligence.

### PARIS

JOSHUA HAYES BREWSTER Miner and leader of the Coloradans.

VERNON HALL Colorado miner.

WARNER O'DEMING Colorado miner.

ALVIN COULTER Colorado miner.

THOMAS PRICE Colorado miner.

CHARLES WIDNEY Colorado miner.

JOHN CALDWELL Colorado miner.

WALTER SCHMIDT Colorado miner.

JAKE HOBART Colorado miner.

FOSTER GLY Head of special security for the Société des Mines de Lorraine.

YVES MASSARD Assistant to Gly.

THERESA MASSARD Yves's sister-in-law.

HENRI FAVREAU BELL'S contact in Paris.

## **THE ARCTIC**

RAGNAR FYRIE Captain of the whaler *Hvalar Batur*.

IVAR IVARSSON Chief engineer of the *Hvalar Batur*.

MAGNUS Crewman.

ARN Crewman.

PETR Crewman.

THE OTHER PETR Crewman.

GUNNAR Crewman.

## **ENGLAND**

JOEL WALLACE Van Dorn agent.

DAVIDA BRYER Wallace's assistant.

GEORGE DEVLIN Gangster.



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[Art 1 TK]

# PROLOGUE



New York City

April

THE SKY OVER MANHATTAN WAS THE COLOR OF OLD PEWTER. THE clouds were so low that the tops of some of the tallest buildings vanished into the mist. The air had a biting edge, while the Hudson Hawk, the famed wind that blew along its namesake river, was in full flight. The spring-like weather from a week earlier was but a memory to the city dwellers.

An armored Chevy Suburban with government plates eased up to the midblock curb in a downtown neighborhood. A late-twenties man in a trench coat holding a furled black umbrella and obviously waiting for the vehicle pushed himself from the flower box he'd been leaning against and approached the big SUV as its passenger's-side window whispered down.

The driver, a thirty-year veteran in providing security for government officials, said nothing.

"Greetings," the pedestrian stammered. He peered into the backseat and his mouth flattened into a line when he saw it was unoccupied. "I'm

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Thomas Gwynn. I'm supposed to meet with the NUMA Director. The National Underwater and Marine Agency. Dirk Pitt."

Back at the beginning of his career, the driver, Vin Blankenship, would have asked to see ID, but he'd checked the website of the law firm where Gwynn worked and recognized the younger man from his online bio. "Mr. Pitt texted me to say his meeting at the UN is running a little long. He asked that I pick you up before I get him, and then we head over to Queens."

"Oh, sure. That's no problem." Gwynn let himself into the back of the big truck. He loosened the belt on his coat. "Nice and warm in here."

Despite the extra weight of its armor and bulletproof glass, the Suburban pulled from the curb with remarkable agility and power. Its throaty V-8 was as heavily modified as her coachwork.

Blankenship soon had the big truck cruising north on the FDR. Had he wanted, he could have hit the sirens and lights, but he figured they had plenty of time.

"Did you drive Mr. Pitt here from Washington?" Gwynn asked, just for something to say.

"No. I'm from the New York office. I was assigned to him while he's here for the UN conference. I picked him up at Penn two days ago, and I'll be dropping him off there after the tour—or whatever it is he wanted to see today."

"FBI?"

"Secret Service."

"Does he need protection like that?"

"C'mon, this is New York. Everyone needs protection." Blankenship laughed at his own joke.

Fifteen minutes later, he wheeled the Suburban onto the plaza in front of the five-hundred-and-five-foot glass monolith that is the United Nations headquarters. He had to present credentials to guards in black

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tac gear and slalom through concrete barriers to approach the building. He stopped and rolled down his window so he'd be recognized. His wasn't the only government Suburban present.

There were dozens of people milling around on the plaza, huddled in little groups of three and four, all with name tags. Most wore smiles and were shaking hands in self-congratulatory ways. Most were dressed in suits, but there were a few Arabs in white *dishdashas* and some African women in dresses as colorful as tropical bird feathers. This had been a truly international affair. One solitary figure that did not look so pleased spied the idling SUV and its driver. He launched himself across the crowded esplanade with a single-mindedness usually reserved for master jewelers about to make a critical cut.

Dirk Pitt was tall, and rather more lanky than muscular, with a swirl of dark hair and bright green eyes. His mouth was usually held in such a way as to convey a sense that he found life to be pleasantly amusing. Not now, though. His eyes were dark, like the color of a squall at sea, and his mouth was pinched so that his jaw jutted out.

"You look even worse today than after yesterday's meetings," Blankenship said as Pitt neared the Suburban.

Pitt pulled himself up into the passenger's seat next to the driver. This broke security protocol, but the NUMA Director had assured the Secret Service vet that if anything happened he would make sure blame would fall squarely on his own shoulders.

Pitt said, "I may not know how to stem the tide of so much plastic waste entering the world's oceans, but I do know that spending days in a lecture hall with a bunch of overfed and overindulged bureaucrats who decide nothing other than the agenda for the next round of meetings isn't going to solve anything." He gave a little shudder and, just like that, the darkness enveloping him evaporated. He looked back over his shoulder with a friendly grin and an outstretched hand. "Thomas

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Gwynn, I'm Dirk Pitt. Thanks for agreeing to meet in such an unorthodox way. My schedule's tight, and my wife says I have to be back in Washington tonight for a birthday party for her chief of staff."

"This is no problem at all," Gwynn replied. He realized how soft his hand must have felt to Pitt's calloused grip. The man ran a massive government agency, but it was clear he was no overfed, overindulged bureaucrat. "Your wife is Congresswoman Loren Smith."

"I'm a lucky man," Pitt said with obvious love. "I will admit that you piqued my interest when you called my office. It was just good luck that I was coming to New York the next day. Most people are aware of the *Titanic* salvage, some may even remember that I headed the raising, but to the best of my knowledge the fact we were hoping to recover the byzanium ore from her holds remains classified. How do you know about that?" Pitt held up a finger to forestall the answer to ask the driver, "You know where we're heading, right."

"I grew up ten minutes from that old site," Blankenship replied. "I used to fish the East River just upstream."

Pitt grinned. "I hope you didn't eat anything you caught."

The Secret Serviceman chuckled. "We couldn't even identify half the things we caught."

Turning his attention back to Thom Gwynn, Pitt asked again, "So, how do you know about the byzanium?"

"My law firm kept papers on behalf of the man who recovered it."

Pitt nodded, and stated, "Joshua Hayes Brewster. A Colorado hard rock miner who first discovered the ore on Novaya Zemlya Island in the Russian Arctic and then returned in 1911 with a group of other men to wrest it from the mountain."

He knew the story as surely as he knew his own.

"No, Mr. Pitt. I'm talking about Isaac Bell."

A shadow of confusion passed over Pitt's eyes. While he couldn't

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recount the names of the other miners, he did remember none of them were named Bell. “You’ve lost me.”

“I’m not surprised. Are you familiar with the Van Dorn Detective Agency?”

“Yes. I know they were as big and famous as Pinkerton.”

“In an age when hotels had their own in-house detectives, and railways hired armies of guards, Joseph Van Dorn built a thriving business around the motto ‘We never give up! Never!’ Isaac Bell was the lead investigator. Perhaps the greatest detective of his—or any—generation.”

“Okay,” Pitt said cautiously. “I don’t doubt that, but you need to believe me when I say that he had nothing to do with mining the byzantium or working to smuggle it aboard the *Titanic*. I lived that project for what seemed like the better part of a year. There were no private investigators involved.”

“Mr. Bell kept his presence out of all records. He even rewrote Brewster’s notes so that his name was expunged.”

Pitt’s face still showed nothing but confusion.

“Let me explain it this way, Mr. Pitt.”

“Dirk,” he said absently. “Please.”

“Sure, Dirk. Okay. So, Isaac Bell, over the course of his long career, came into possession of a great many secrets. Things that could ruin family dynasties, destroy the credibility of companies and even nations, and reveal hidden motives and behind-the-scenes players of some of the most pivotal events of the first half of the twentieth century. He had all this information, but unlike J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI’s first director, Bell had no interest in furthering himself through blackmail or intimidation. He was just a man who knew a lot of secrets.

“When he retired, he decided to record secrets and stories. I must say, had he not been so good as a detective, he could have been a pulp fiction writer. Tales of his exploits read like adventure books. He also

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knew that while some of what he wrote about must never see the light of day—and those journals were likely burned upon his death—he felt that other stories could be made public at some future date when those most involved were long dead and the legacy had been relegated to the ‘dusty corner of history.’ Those are his exact words.

“These files he placed in trust with his attorney with detailed instructions as to when and with whom they could be shared. Much of it was straightforward, like ‘thirty years after the death of so and so, please see that his surviving children are given this envelope. If they are deceased, please see that it is given to a grandchild.’ That sort of thing.”

“Sounds reasonable.”

“There were other files that he left up to the attorney’s discretion as to who to share the information with, although Bell did specify the year in which to make the disbursement, usually some benchmark important to the tale, although I’ve seen a few that just give a date with no explanation.

“So now, we spring ahead decades after Bell’s death, and his attorney built a practice into what is now Gitterman, Shankle, and Capps. My current employer and one of the city’s largest law firms. And to this day we continue to honor our commitment in seeing the last few Isaac Bell files find their proper home.”

“And you think that’s me?” Pitt still didn’t quite get the connection.

“Yes, well, when the date on this particular file came do, one of the senior partners had the honor of reading it first. He wasn’t sure what to do, but his secretary knew that I was something of a *Titanic* buff. My namesake uncle was part of the recovery operation. He once told me you were the man who raised the *Titanic*. He was a hoist operator on one of the support ships. The *Modoc*.”

“I’ll be damned,” Pitt said. “I thought your name rang a bell. Tommy Gwynn. You don’t look much like him, I have to say.”

“I know. Right? He was huge.”



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Pitt caught the tense the lawyer used. “Was? What happened?”

“He left NUMA a short time after the *Titanic* operation and worked as a crane operator here in New York. There was an accident at a construction site. Uncle Tommy and two other men were killed. That was eight or nine years ago.” Councilor Gwynn paused for a moment, grief darkening his eyes before he thrust it aside. “Back to the story. The senior partners tapped me to find the right person to share this with and I immediately thought of you once I’d read it and did some digging into the lives of Brewster and the rest of his miners—”

“They called themselves the Coloradans,” Pitt interjected.

Gwynn nodded eagerly. “Bell mentioned that. There’s no family left for any of them, since all but one never married except—”

“Jake Hobart.” Now that he was thinking again about that long-ago mission, more and more details were flooding Pitt’s mind.

“That’s right. Hobart was married, but his wife is long dead, and they didn’t have children. Since no one remains from the time the mineral was mined and put aboard the *Titanic*, I figured why not give it to the guy who found it in the end? Bell’s journal doesn’t change the basic facts, but I thought you might be interested in the backstory of how the events unfolded more than a hundred years ago.”

From a deep pocket inside his trench coat, the young attorney withdrew a sheaf of yellowed papers in a sealed plastic bag. The first page just had a simple two-word title. *The Coloradans*. Pitt was about to open the bag when Blankenship interrupted.

“Just so you know, we’re only five minutes away.”

“Okay,” Pitt said, so engrossed in what Gwynn had to tell him, he hadn’t realized how swiftly they’d crossed the East River.

Thomas Gwynn said, “I told you I didn’t mind meeting on the fly like this, but what’s so important about some turtles at a riverside construction site in Queens?”

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“Not some turtles,” Pitt corrected. “The *Turtle*. In the cargo space behind you is a leather overnight backpack and a waterproof dive bag. Could you hand me the bag.”

Gwynn leaned over the rear bench to recover the bag and handed it to Pitt. Pitt had already slipped off his leather shoes. He held one up so both driver and passenger could see it. “My wife got me these as an expensive practical joke, thinking I would never wear Italian loafers, but they’re more comfortable than sneakers.”

From the dive bag he removed a pair of shin-high rubber boots and an insulated high-vis windbreaker. He jammed his feet into the galoshes and contorted his way into the jacket while penned in by the Suburban’s confines.

“Here’s a story for you,” Pitt said when he clicked on his seat belt once again. “Following the battles of Lexington and Concord during our Revolutionary War against the British, an inventor living near New Haven named David Bushnell proposed building a submersible craft that could be used to affix mines to the underside of the English ships blockading New York Harbor. None other than George Washington himself liked the proposal and agreed to fund it.

“All that summer, and into the fall, Bushnell and several dedicated woodworkers, metalsmiths, and self-taught engineers built the submarine. About ten feet tall and barrel-shaped—or, as once described, resembling two turtle shells that had been fused together—it was made of iron-banded wood like the staves of a barrel and powered by a pair of hand-cranked screws. It also had an auger that was designed to bore into a ship’s hull so an explosive charge could be affixed. It had a foot-pedal bilge pump and windows in a metal . . . Well, I guess conning tower is the best way to describe it. All in all, it was ungainly, awkward, and utterly brilliant.

“And also, a total failure,” Pitt added. “In the summer of 1776, after

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a lot of sea trials and testing, one Sergeant Ezra Lee was selected to be the *Turtle*'s pilot. Finally, in September of that year, Lee launched the *Turtle* at the British flagship HMS *Eagle*, which was at anchor below Governors Island at the mouth of New York Harbor. It took Lee two hours to maneuver the submersible, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get the upward-facing drill to bite deep enough into the *Eagle*'s hull to set the explosives. In retrospect, it's pretty easy to see that maintaining the *Turtle*'s stability while drilling in that exact location was practically impossible given the tides and currents."

"Not to mention the poor guy must have been exhausted," Blankenship said.

Pitt nodded. "The *Turtle* was thought to have only enough air for a half hour. He could replenish his supply by surfacing as he crossed the harbor, but by the end of his attempt at boring into the *Eagle* he would have been delirious from too much carbon dioxide.

"They tried attacking a different ship a month later with the same result. Not long afterward, the British sank the *Turtle*'s support ship on the Jersey side of the harbor. Bushnell claims he salvaged the little sub, but its fate was lost to history."

"Until now?" Thomas Gwynn hazarded.

"Exactly. Interesting, it wouldn't be until almost a hundred years later that a submarine was successful at sinking an enemy warship. That was the Confederate sub *Hunley*, which rammed a torpedo into the USS *Housatonic* during the Civil War."

They were approaching a large construction zone in a commercial section of the city. The ground was mostly broken-up asphalt. The nearby buildings were brick or metal and windowless. Several old smokestacks were silhouetted against the skyline. Dumpsters and rusted equipment littered the alleys between buildings, and most vertical surfaces were desecrated with multiple layers of graffiti, none of which

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could be considered art. The fine mist that had hung in the air all day became heavier. Not yet a rain, it was a perfect gloomy pall for the forlorn district.

Just ahead, a long corrugated metal fence blocked further access to the neighborhood. A temporary guardhouse had been set up next to an open gate. The metal shack's bank of fluorescent ceiling lights looked especially bright in the gathering murk. Hidden by the fence was a large crane. Its spindly boom was visible as it reached for the sky.

Blankenship braked at the gate. The guard begrudgingly left the warm confines of his little metal hut and stepped out and over to the idling SUV.

The Secret Service agent jerked a thumb toward his passenger. "That's Dirk Pitt, the head of NUMA. He's expected."

"Sec," the guard said. He returned to the guardhouse and consulted a clipboard that he probably should have carried with him but hadn't bothered to. He looked up, caught Blankenship's eye, and nodded.

The worksite was vast, at least ten acres. Much of what had stood here before had been dismantled and carried away, and a huge amount of polluted fill had been hauled out for decontamination. A massive stone and brick seawall held back the waters of the East River, which were flowing by on both the meltwater channeled from the Hudson via the Harlem River at the very top of Manhattan Island and an ebbing king tide that was escaping through the river from Long Island Sound.

Vic Blankenship looked around. "When I was a kid, this was all warehouses and old manufacturing plants. Smelled awful even on a good day."

"The state archeologist told me," Pitt said, "that from the time of the Civil War until about 1913, there was a plant here to convert coal into gas. The ground was saturated with contaminants that were never

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removed. The next generation of industry simply capped the old sludge and built anew.”

Gwynn asked, rather unnecessarily, “And here’s where they found the *Turtle*?”

“As I understand it, an excavator was removing overburden when the bucket hit stone. Not unusual, since all the old foundations were left behind when newer buildings were put up. The operator cleared an area around the granite blocks. It turns out it was a sump below the foundation of a building that had been here around the time of the Revolutionary War. The cavity had a stone lid that the machine slid aside. The inside was filled with fly ash and oil that was still somewhat liquid, and sticking out of it was this brass dome. He managed to open it and peer inside. He didn’t know exactly what he found, but he told a supervisor, who eventually found someone who recognized the *Turtle* from a replica he’s seen at a museum in Connecticut. Archeologists from the state and city level were brought in.”

“And NUMA?” Thomas asked.

“Not really. We heard about the find, naturally. I’m here because, as a lover of archeology, I’m curious. I’m just using my NUMA credentials to get access to what’s otherwise a closed site.”

“Is anything going to be happening today?”

“Absolutely. Today they’re going to attempt to pull the *Turtle* out of the hole it’s been resting in for nearly two hundred and fifty years.”

They parked the Suburban next to several other cars, mostly sedans and pickup trucks. The trucks belonged to the workmen, the cars, no doubt, to the archeologists and techs overseeing the discovery of the nation’s first submarine.

The site that had been dug out was easily two football fields long and a hundred feet wide. Some material had been left in place along the

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old seawall to buttress it against the gray river just beyond. At the bottom of the twenty-foot-deep excavation were large earthmovers, dump trucks, shipping containers for other gear, and dozens of portable pumps with hoses snaking up and out to a separate containment pond that had been purposely dug to store contaminated seepage for later cleanup.

It didn't appear that anyone was working. The site felt abandoned except for the big crane that was maneuvering a large section of steel closer to the seawall. A couple of hard-hatted workers were atop the wall waiting to guide the steel into place. There was a raised platform at the edge of the construction zone. They couldn't see where the *Turtle* lay buried because blue plastic tarps had been erected over the dig to protect the craft from the elements. The tarps rippled in the chilling wind.

The precipitation ratcheted up a notch and now fell as a light rain. The ground at the lip of the site was a muddy morass. Blankenship declined to join Pitt in his trek across to a raised platform holding a half dozen people, but young Gwynn joined him.

As they neared the gathering, Pitt could hear voices rising and tension mounting.

"I don't care who gave you authorization. Until my office is satisfied that this site is secure, no one is going down there. Your toy boat'll just have to wait." The speaker was a man wearing a hard hat and a safety orange vest over a Carhartt coat. Pitt noticed that he was from OSHA, the government watchdog for workplace safety.

Facing off against him was a man and a woman dressed in civilian attire, although they wore proper boots. Pitt correctly guessed that these two were the archeologists, who were doubtlessly concerned that the submersible needed to be conserved as soon as possible.

It was the woman who spoke for them. "It will only take a few

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hours. We've excavated the ash and tar from the pit. All that's left is bracing up the hull and rigging the crane."

"Lady, I don't care," the OSHA inspector fired back. From his tone, Pitt could tell that he loved throwing his weight around.

"Excuse me," he said. "Hi. I'm Dirk Pitt. Are you Dr. Lawrence?"

The female academic turned to him. "Susan Lawrence. Yes. I'm sorry, who are you?"

"Dirk Pitt. I spoke to someone in your office about coming today to see the *Turtle*. I'm the Director of the National Underwater and Marine Agency."

She nodded sharply. "Yes, I recall now. I am sorry to say, but it seems you wasted a trip from Washington because our site just got shut down by OSHA."

Pitt didn't mention he was playing hooky on the last day of a UN conference to be here. He turned his attention to the OSHA supervisor. The safety inspector nodded to one of his guys, who, in turn, grabbed two hard hats off a table and handed them to Pitt and Gwynn. "What seems to be the problem?"

"The problem is, the contractor was supposed to leave twenty feet's worth of earth in place next to the seawall, with a sixty percent grade down to the bottom of the pit. As you can see—as you *all* can see," he said with special emphasis, "there's barely ten feet of ground remaining, and its face is perfectly vertical. There isn't enough fill to backstop the seawall and it's in danger of breaching. It looks like they're attempting to shore it up with steel plating, but until I see and go over the engineering specs on that plan, I'm declaring this site too dangerous."

"You must understand," the male archeologist pled, "the *Turtle*'s entire hull is exposed to the air, and every moment we delay could cause irreparable damage." He then remembered another detail and he went

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ashen. “By God, we left the hatch open. You must let us at least reseal the hatch.”

The OSHA inspector said, “Look, I’m not an idiot. I know how these things work. I’ve been to a lot of sites around the city where you guys are called in, but I can’t let you down there until I’m satisfied that it’s safe.”

Another of the group chimed in. He was dressed like the construction guys but neater, as if he’d never faced the mud and slop found at a typical work zone. He looked like someone from the front office. “Come’n, John. Our engineers sent the changes in the specs to the city three weeks ago. Someone there gave us temporary approval.”

“That doesn’t give you the right to change anything until a final review. Besides, you dug out the remaining material before you had your steel protection up over the existing seawall.”

“Well, okay, that was a screwup,” the man admitted. “The contractor dug much faster than we . . .”

Pitt was tuning out the conversation. He knew how this would ultimately end. The jobsite was going to be shut down for the foreseeable future. The *Turtle* would undoubtedly suffer some degradation, but ultimately he didn’t think the world’s earliest example of an attack submarine would be damaged too severely. And who knew? Depending on the schedule, maybe he could still sneak up to see it hoisted from its two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old cocoon.

He watched the men working the steel out on the seawall. He would have assumed that the OSHA inspector would have ordered them off the structure, but he had to be enough of a pragmatist to know that placing the heavy metal caps over the existing wall could be done much faster than in-filling the massive excavation to the original design specifications.



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The steel structural members were about fifty feet long and L-shaped. The two leaves of metal were each at least an inch thick. The shorter leg would rest atop the seawall, and likely be bolted directly into the cement. The longer section would dangle nearly thirty feet down along its face and well into the riverbank's muck and ooze. Pitt's gut told him, and likely the OSHA guy would agree, that this was an acceptable alternative to leaving twice as much contaminated soil in the work zone to buttress the old seawall.

The crane was swinging one of the huge steel pieces across the site and over the wall as Pitt watched. Two men in hard hats were on the wall ready to guide the piece into place with ropes hanging from each end. This was a bread-and-butter type maneuver for ironworkers, something these guys had probably done thousands of times on high-rises and bridges all over the city.

One worker patiently waited for the hundred-foot rope to gently be lowered so he could reach it. His partner might have done the same, had a gust of wind suddenly hit the plate, twisting his rope so that it started floating away out over the East River.

Pitt never knew why the guy leapt for it. The wind would have died down and the line would have eventually come back to him. He would later come to realize that the workmen had been told to get the job done before the contractor incurred more delays and penalties.

The steelworker managed to grab the rope just before it looped out of reach, but his two hundred pounds was no match for the thirty tons of dangling steel and he was quickly yanked off his feet. The delicately balanced rigging connecting the plate to the crane's forged-steel hook wouldn't have registered such a tiny imbalance had the machine's operator not overreacted. Fearing for the man's safety, that he could fall to the swift current below, the operator snapped back on a lever to reverse

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the boom's swing. The sudden change in momentum caused the massive steel plate to dip enough to upset its center of gravity. In seconds, what had once been a routine maneuver had spiraled out of control.

The plate twisted and corkscrewed in the air like a bird of prey caught by one foot. The second rigger fled his post, not knowing what was going to happen next. The man clutching the rope was tossed and whipped about like a rag doll and was about to be flung either far out into the river, where his heavy clothes and boots would surely drown him, or, equally deadly, be hurled into the pit, where most of his bones would break upon impact.

The crane operator moved more levers in rapid succession, the jolt of adrenaline making his hands tremble. He timed his action so when the plate dropped from the sky, the iron rigger flopped onto the seawall at the full extension of his rope. He was well clear when the mass of steel slammed into the old concrete like the chisel of a jackhammer.

The crumbly masonry came apart as though it had been hit by an explosive. The clang of the impacted echoed painfully across the site as though the Roman god Vulcan had struck his mighty hammer against the anvil of the earth.

Pitt was in motion even before the full effects of the disaster became clear. He turned to Thom Gwynn and said, "Call 911. Make sure they send divers."

Pitt legged over the metal rail that acted as a barrier for the platform overlooking the construction site. The drop to the roof of a container down in the excavation was about ten feet, but Pitt's perception, since he was a tall man, added another five and a half. He didn't hesitate. The wind rushed past his ears and his hard hat was blown from his head. He landed well, letting the big muscles of his legs absorb some of the impact before he dipped a shoulder to collapse his body in order to absorb the rest. He let momentum carry him back up to his feet, and he ran to the

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edge of the container. He paused to look across the workings to the steel plate that had been rammed into the retaining wall.

Cracks had appeared directly below the impact, and they ran from the top of the wall to where it was buttressed by the dirt left in place. Already, water was burbling through these cracks, frothing and angry and eager to exploit the seams as though it resented being penned up behind such an artificial barrier. In seconds, water was snaking across the dirt berm and cascading down its face. As it fell into the pit the water remained clear for just a moment before its erosive forces started chewing through the ground and it turned a muddy brown. All this was taking place a good hundred yards from the square stone sump that had been the *Turtle's* home for two and a half centuries.

Pitt had spent his entire career above and below the waters of the world, and few men alive today better understood its undeniable power. He knew what was coming. What he didn't know, what he was betting his life on, was if he had time enough to accomplish what he'd set out to do. He'd done many rash things over the years, putting his life on the line more times than he could count, and while he'd never second-guessed a decision he'd made, he did wonder for a fleeting moment if what he was about to attempt was worth dying for. Realizing the history that was about to be lost, he tore his gaze from the inevitable destruction that was about to be unleashed and focused instead on the ground below the container.

A dark spot appeared on the striated face of the earthworks berm. It quickly spread, opening like an obscene stain. It remained black for a fraction of a second before it turned muddy brown, and the soil became gelatinous and bulged.

Pitt didn't need to see anything further. He started running across the bottom of the site, his rubber boots flopping and splashing through the accumulating rainwater. Drops seared his eyes but didn't slow him

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at all. His legs pistoned and his arms swung, and his breath came in deep, measured draws, while a few hundred feet away the bulge burst in an explosion of roiling mud. An instant later the entirety of the berm above the hole collapsed into it, the hundreds of tons of dirt and rock and industrial fill vanishing into a cauldron of muck and icy water.

While he didn't turn to see the wave that would now be racing across the floor of the workings, Pitt could hear its sloshing roar and feel the chill wind as it pushed air ahead of it. He might not have been the younger version of himself who'd spearheaded the raising of the *Titanic*, but he'd kept in shape. He was almost to the blue tarpaulin shelter the archeologists had erected around their find when the first of the surge raced past him and almost knocked his feet out from underneath him with its power.

The water hampered his gait, but he fought on, pushing through as fast as he could, actually managing to get ahead of the rising water so what had once swirled around his ankles now fell to an easy half-inch puddle. He saw a seam in one of the tarped walls and rushed through it. The room the scientists had created inside was dim. There were sets of construction lamps on poles, but none were lit, and Pitt didn't have the time to waste.

**T**HE *TURTLE* WAS MADE OF WOODEN STAVES, LIKE A BARREL, AND bound with thick wrought iron rings. It had a round conning tower rising from its squat hull that was ringed with glass portholes. Two curled tubes rose from it. These were snorkels for when the *Turtle* was traveling just below the surface. Once it was completely submerged, the operator only had as much air as the volume of the ungainly craft allowed. Next to the conning tower was the hand-cranked vertical propeller. Its blades, like everything else, were blacked with tar pitch, but

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Pitt guessed they would be bronze. Deeper into the stone-lined sump, he could see the *Turtle's* larger main prop and a square rudder operated by mechanical levers.

He took in all that detail on the fly because the water had reached the edge of the sump and would fill it in mere seconds. He leapt across the five feet of open air between the edge of the pit and the *Turtle's* metal-shod upper deck and threw himself feetfirst down the hatch. His rubber boots landed on a padded seat. The hatch encircled his hips. He blindly felt around with his feet to figure the best way to shoehorn himself into the one-man submersible. The water was a frothing boil as it rose up the filthy walls of the sump. In seconds, Pitt's mad attempt to save the relic would be for naught.

He finally worked his body down into the submersible's dank hull. Just as the water was about to sweep across the rounded upper deck, Pitt slammed the hatch closed. There was a mechanism with a butterfly screw to tighten the seal. Water began spurting in where a cork gasket had long ago rotted away. He worked his fingers to twist the mechanism and eventually turned the nut enough to expand an inner ring that compressed the hull and the hatch together.

He realized his lungs were heaving from his breakneck race to save the *Turtle* and was acutely aware that air had become a precious commodity. He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and activated its flashlight.

The inside of the submersible had an H. G. Wells feel to it, with brightworks mechanisms, gears and cogs made of brass and bronze, as well as rack-and-pinion devices as finely crafted as a Swiss watch. His seat had been padded in leather, although his weight had cracked it apart and pieces had fallen to the floor. By his left knee was a hand-operated pump for clearing out the bilge, which he could hear burbling down below the floorboards. Next to him was a wire rack containing

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what appeared to be a journal or diary wrapped in oilskin. It looked to be in better shape than the leather seat, but Pitt wisely didn't touch it.

The little light that had shone in through the hatch widows went completely dark as the sump filled and a river began inundating the construction site.

Pitt tried to calculate how long it would take to rescue him. Judging by the torrent of water he'd seen rushing over the seawall, he figured the river would inundate the blocks-long excavation completely in about thirty minutes. By then, police and fire crews would be on hand, as well as divers he'd told Thomas Gwynn to request. There was a crane on-site with more than enough lifting ability, and the divers would be able to rig a sling easy enough. He estimated forty-five minutes, tops, and he'd be able to pop the hatch once again. Unlike the original pilot, Ezra Lee, Pitt had no need to crank the screws in order to propel the *Turtle*. He could sit quietly in his dark little cocoon and wait to be pulled free.

Unseen above Pitt, the upstream breach created by the steel plate continued to widen in fits and starts as the gushing water clawed at more of the concrete and dissolved more of the berm. In all, the excavation was filling, but at a steadily increasing pace. Just as Pitt settled in his wait, the backflow of water along the inner side of the earthen buttress began to rip away great slabs of dirt and rock that fell into the construction site like calving ice off a glacier. It was the deadweight of the berm that helped the old seawall keep the river from collapsing into the pit, but at a critical tipping point enough of the plug had been dissolved by the flood's scouring action that in a single catastrophic failure a forty-foot-long section of the stone wall and what was left of the inner berm failed spectacularly. A raging wall of seawater exploded into the site, washing against all sides and throwing spume high into the air and sending a wave of water speeding nearly three blocks inland with

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enough force to shove parked cars away from curbs and topple any pedestrian unlucky enough to be in its way.

For Dirk Pitt, it was like he'd been tossed into an industrial washing machine and it had been set on spin-dry. The colossal surge had created undercurrents in the water already filling the excavation, and like a leaf caught in a gutter the little submersible was yanked from its centuries-old home and borne along like any other bit of flotsam that eventually found itself in New York Harbor.

**F**REEZING COLD WATER FROM THE BILGE SOAKED PITT TO THE SKIN while he braced his arms and legs across the tight cockpit to keep from bashing himself against any of the sharp handles and mechanisms used to propel and steer the craft. Once the initial surge subsided, the weight of water and a ballasted keel righted the submersible. Pitt knew he'd been wrenched from the sump and could now feel the bottom of the *Turtle* scraping ever so slowly along the rocky floor of the excavation. Any chance of a quick rescue was over. The added pressure of the deepening water increased the seepage from around the hatch above Pitt's head. What had been an occasional drip was quickly becoming a steady downpour.

The craft would fill swiftly, but Pitt wasn't ready to throw in the towel just yet.

He reached for the brass handle that operated the bilge pump and gave it a push. The lever moved with relative ease. What didn't was the rubberized canvas bellows that actually created the suction. Like the leather padding for the bench seat, the old material had lost all pliability in the past quarter millennium and turned to so much dust with the slightest pressure.

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As a hobby, Pitt restored classic automobiles. He was good with his hands, understood machines, and when he studied the pump with his phone's flashlight he could tell that all it needed to operate properly was some way of building and releasing air pressure. The weave of his rain jacket was too porous to be effective against the water pressure outside the *Turtle's* hull, but in a flash of inspiration he knew what he had to do.

Pitt wedged his phone into the wire rack so that it shone down on the pumping mechanism and he got to work.

He usually carried a multi-tool in his pocket. It wasn't something the airlines would have let him keep on board, which was why he preferred Amtrak when traveling to New York or Boston. He fished the knife/pliers from his pants and toed off one of his boots. The pliers gave him the leverage he needed to release the tension on the binding ring holding the tattered remains of the old bellows to the pump. Next he cut the uppers from the bottom of the boot. He slipped what was essentially a Croc back onto his foot and was left with a rubber tube more than tall enough to fit the diminutive pump. He trimmed the rubber down a few inches and set the bottom edge in place and clamped it tight with the pliers. He then forced the stiff rubber into the upper part of the pump so that it fit under the pump's metal cap. He ratcheted the binding ring closed with the pliers, creating an airtight seal again.

He began to work the pump handle back and forth. Each time, the hollow leg of his boot sucked flat, then expanded out. In moments he'd built up enough pressure in the system to begin pulling water out of the bilge and through a pipe fitted with a one-way valve that led outside the hull.

Not sure if the pump would allow him to get ahead of the water leaking into the cylindrical compartment, Pitt took an extra minute to slice part of his jacket into strips, then used his multi-tool's knife blade to wedge into the gap between the hatch and the inner ring. The cloth



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quickly soaked through and water dripped from it, but at one-tenth the previous rate. Pitt was just turning his attention back to the pump when the sound of the *Turtle* rasping against the bottom suddenly stopped and the craft shook violently. Pitt braced himself. He immediately knew that the current had sucked the relic from the excavation and it was now floating in the main channel of the East River. He had no idea how deep the river ran or the crush depth of the ancient craft, and he had no intention of discovering either.

He went to work on the pump like a man abandoned, trying not to dwell on the fact that with all the old tar stuck to its hull the *Turtle* may no longer be buoyant enough to float. He could feel the submersible twist and spin as it was caught in the eddies and current.

Back and forth he moved the pump handle, each stroke taking tiny sips of the mass of water sloshing across the *Turtle*'s floor. For ten solid minutes, changing hands when his arm grew stiff, he sucked the bilge almost dry and was rewarded with the faint aura of weak light coming through the cleanest of the conning tower windows. Pitt couldn't tell if the sub had breached the surface or not. Even turning off his flashlight didn't give him a better perspective. The glass was still dirty and the sun was hidden by storm clouds, but he felt inordinately pleased with his efforts so far.

He turned his flashlight back on.

"Ok, let's see how we're doing," Pitt muttered and reached for the screw stopper of one of the twin snorkel tubes. He couldn't work it with his fingers and attacked it with the pliers. Once he broke the initial seal, the brass plug remained tight. He worked at an awkward angle, and the metal fought him for every degree it turned, and while Pitt wasn't in any immediate danger from asphyxia the air was getting a bit heavy to breath.

Water spluttered from the tube. Pitt waited a moment to make sure

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it wasn't just some residue in the line but rather that the snorkel's mouth was still submerged. He retightened the plug. He was definitely still underwater. But judging by the light oozing in from above, the surface was tantalizingly close.

He checked the orange-faced Doxa watch that had been strapped to his wrist for decades. Only twenty minutes had elapsed since he'd he raced to save the *Turtle*. Rescue teams would certainly be on the scene by now, though he doubted police divers would have had time to reach the construction site, let alone get into their diving suits and tanks. Pitt figured he still had enough air in the submersible to last long enough for the divers to reach the old sump. His problem came from the fact that he was no longer where they expected to find him, and he doubted anyone saw the underwater craft get swept out of the worksite and into the river. Recalling the speed of the current before the accident, Pitt estimated he was a mile south of where they expected to find him. For all he knew, he could be abreast of Roosevelt Island.

Logic told him he'd gambled and lost and that the right course of action was to let the *Turtle* refill and escape so that, with luck, the antique could be recovered from the river. If he waited too long, it was likely that the little submersible would be borne along until it passed Governor's Island and be lost for all time in the lower reaches of the harbor where it widened considerably.

Pitt wasn't one to give in to logic too quickly. Not when he still had options. The vertical propeller hadn't spun in two hundred and fifty years and its blades were encrusted with dried tar that warped their shape and severely degraded their hydrodynamics, but Pitt went for it gamely. At first he couldn't get the prop to crank at all, and it wasn't until he put both hands on the knurled wooden handle and braced his feet against the hull did he succeed in turning it through one tortured revolution. He kept at it, turning it a second, and slightly easier, rota-

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tion, and then a third and fourth time, until he could crank the propeller with one hand only and could feel through the contraption that the spindly blades were actually biting into the frigid river water.

He cast a hopeful eye on the one viewport that let some light filter through but couldn't tell if his efforts had brought the *Turtle* closer to the surface. The glass was just too murky. He knew he had succeeded at further depleting his air supply. Now he had to pull air deep into his lungs to feel he was getting enough oxygen. He did a multiplication question in his head to make certain he wasn't suffering from carbon dioxide intoxication, which manifested itself in loss of cognitive function. A quick check of his watch told him that thirty minutes had passed since he'd sealed himself inside the submersible and he'd just about reached his limit.

One last gamble paid off, however, when he opened the snorkel valve again. Moist icy air came in through the inch-wide tube, and Pitt drew it deep into his lungs. He'd managed to surface the *Turtle*. And no sooner had he taken a half dozen deep breaths, water again sluiced from the snorkel's mouth, forcing Pitt to hastily replace the plug. Negatively buoyant even with her bilge dry, the *Turtle* needed the added boost of the vertical screw to stay on the surface. Once it cleared the water, the craft immediately started to sink again.

Pitt turned the screw handle furiously and could tell by how it lost resistance that it had broken the surface again. He was ready right away to open the snorkel and let fresh air enter the sub for a few precious seconds before the snorkel again dipped beneath the waves and he had to reseal it.

Because the screw and snorkels were taller than the hatch/conning tower, Pitt knew that it was unlikely the top of the submersible breached too. Still, he put his odds slightly above fifty/fifty that a sharp-eyed captain or crew member working one of the dozens of ships, boats, and

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ferries that ply the waters of New York Harbor would spot the *Turtle* as it rose and dove repeatedly while it floated ever southward on the tidal current.

Forty minutes later, Pitt adjusted his odds downward to zero. He'd felt vibrations through the water twice that indicated a boat of some kind was near, but neither had spotted him. The physical effort to keep the *Turtle* close enough to the surface to draw in even a tiny amount of fresh air had run up against the law of diminishing returns. He wasn't sufficiently replenishing the oxygen he was consuming turning the vertical propeller to raise the submersible. He could keep at it for a while longer, but he also knew that once he escaped the one-man sub, he'd still have to contend with the East River. Always a strong swimmer, Pitt was tiring and had to keep some reserves for a grueling struggle once he hit the water. It didn't help that his core temperature had dropped considerably since his clothes had been soaked by the leaky hatch.

Defeat was a bitter pill to swallow, especially for Pitt, as he was a man who had suffered its pangs far less than most. But defeat was something he must now accept. His gamble hadn't paid off at all. It was time to make his escape. He needed the submersible to fill quickly so he could swim clear of it in as shallow a depth as possible. Pitt would use his knife to remove the strips of fabric he'd wedged around the hatch and again the drips would turn into a steady rain.

He'd just started at it when he felt something through the *Turtle's* stout wooden hull. It was like the vibrations he'd experienced earlier when a ship had passed close by, but this was somehow deeper, more menacing. He had a quick mental image of a giant vessel, a container-ship or tanker, bearing down on the submersible on a deadly collision course. He suddenly felt very exposed. The sound and vibration grew until it seemed to fill the submersible, and Pitt finally recognized the

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noise wasn't a ship's screws at all but the rotor downwash from a helicopter.

Ignoring the water dribbling down on his head from the dislodged jury-rigged gasket, Pitt cranked hard on the vertical prop handle with one hand and furiously worked the bilge pump with the other, gritting his teeth against the sharp pain of muscle fiber pushed to its very limit. His lungs were soon sucking desperately at air that contained less and less of the life-giving oxygen and grew more toxic with his exhaled carbon dioxide.

The chopper had to be directly overhead. He could even hear the screams of its turbines over the hurricane-like downdraft. The resistance against the screw blades vanished. Pitt had managed to surface the sub one last time. If no one saw him now there was nothing more that he could do.

He waited, knowing the *Turtle* was already starting to sink again. He held out hope against hope, but as the seconds ticked by he had to admit defeat yet again.

Then came two quick taps against the metal hatch that rang Pitt's head like he was in a bell. A second later a gloved hand smeared away some of the grime from a window and a powerful flashlight beam flared in his eyes. The beam came away and the diver's face mask came into view. Pitt had his cell phone lit and gave the man the index-finger-to-thumb diver's okay, but then eagerly jerked his thumb upward to indicate he wanted to surface. The diver returned both gesture and threw a cocky salute as well.

Pitt could just make out through the newly cleaned porthole that there were two men in the water with him and they were rigging a sling around the submersible. He recognized it as the gear the archeologists had planned on using to hoist the *Turtle* from its centuries-old home.

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He assumed a workboat with a large crane had been near enough to the accident for the netting to be transferred over to her. The chopper had been the boat's spotter.

It took the divers just a few minutes to sling the sub in the netting. One man tapped the glass again to make sure Pitt was ready and then he vanished into the gloom. Dirk braced his arms and legs just as the crane began lifting the *Turtle* out from its watery tomb. It came up much faster than he expected. He felt like he was being wrenched from the river. And then in a burst of weak sunlight the *Turtle* erupted from the water with white sheets of froth cascading from her rounded hull. Pitt immediately reached overhead to undo the hatch. The submersible turned and danced at the end of the line, spinning as the rigging became unkinked. Pitt put his eye close to the cleaner pane of glass. To his astonishment, he realized that he was a hundred feet in the air and still climbing. There was no workboat or crane.

He managed to finally shove open the hatch. Above him was the massive under hull of a Navy CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter. Its rear ramp was open, and two men in olive-drab flight suits and helmets were sitting at its edge with their legs dangling into space. When they spotted Pitt poking his head out of the *Turtle*, they waved jauntily as if this was the most normal thing they'd done all day. Pitt craned his head to look back at the receding river below. The two divers who'd secured the submersible in the netting were being picked up by a small police boat with red and blue strobes flashing on its radar arch.

Before the bitterly cold wind forced him back down into the *Turtle*, Pitt noted that he'd floated halfway to the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge. Considering his level of exhaustion and near hypothermia, he estimated that had he been forced to swim for it that he'd have never made it to either shore.

What had taken Pitt over an hour to cover in the submersible took

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just a few minutes for the jet-propelled transport chopper. Work crews back on the construction site were ready for the helo's payload to be lowered onto a pile of soft sand that had been hastily mounded up by earthmovers. Coordination between the pilot and the loadmaster in the cargo section was precise. The *Turtle* touched down with barely a bump and its weight settled into the sand so when the netting was hastily unhooked from the winch, the gawky little craft remained upright. The chopper roared off as Pitt emerged from the submersible to the rousing cheers of the construction crew, scientists, and the dozens of firefighters, police, and press that had arrived at the scene.

A ladder was quickly brought, and Pitt's back was slapped black and blue by the time he'd gotten to the ground. An EMT threw a blanket over his shoulders, and someone pressed a paper cup of hot coffee into his hand. He kept repeating that he was fine when nearly everyone thronging around him asked if he was all right. He allowed himself to be escorted to the back of an ambulance but refused the offer of a ride to the hospital. He knew from experience that all he needed was a long shower, three or so shots of Don Julio Blanco tequila, and a soft bed.

Fortunately, the police kept the press back at a respectful distance. At Pitt insistence, Thomas Gwynn and Vin Blankenship were allowed to join him.

"Hell of a stunt, Mr. Pitt," Blankenship said. "I couldn't imagine the paperwork I'd be doing had you not made it back."

Pitt chuckled at the man's unflappable nature. It reminded him a little of how Al Giordino treated the world. "I am relieved that you've been saved that fate, but somehow I don't think they'd blame you if the guy you're guarding ran off to save an old submarine. Things might have been a lot grimmer if the Navy hadn't gotten here so fast. Any ideas how that happened, by the way?"

Gwynn said, "One of the workers out on the seawall actually saw

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the sub get flushed out into the river, so the police didn't even bother sending divers down to look for you. They called in the Coast Guard to start scouring the river, and there was a Navy chopper doing a search and rescue drills on Long Island Sound."

"Just before they reached Manhattan," Blankenship added, "the crew were directed here to pick up the sling used to pull the sub from the water. It was a police drone that actually spotted you, and its operator vectored in the Navy bird."

"All and all, pretty slick," Thomas Gwynn summed up.

Pitt nodded. "I was just getting ready to pull the plug and swim for it when I heard them. Literally another few seconds later and the *Turtle* would have been lost."

"Was it really worth it?" Blankenship asked.

Had he known Pitt better, he wouldn't have posed the question. Dirk Pitt looked over to where the archeologists were swarming around their prize find. This wasn't something he'd done for them—or even for himself, really—this was about preserving the past so someone in the future could look at the *Turtle* and find inspiration to make the world a better place. Pitt looked him square in the eye. "Absolutely."

Three hours later, Pitt stepped from the hotel bathroom with a plush robe wrapped around his body and splashed more room service tequila into a glass. He'd been interviewed by the police for the better part of two hours. Blankenship had driven Thom Gwynn back to his office and returned with some dry clothes he'd picked up at an outlet store. After the police were done with him, Pitt spoke to a few reporters for no other reason than to get some good press for NUMA, fudging that his presence at the archeological site had been official. He had no desire to spend hours on a train back to D.C., so he'd managed to extend his stay at his hotel near the UN. Outside, the skyline was jeweled by a million lights as the storm had cleared, leaving the air clean and fresh.



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Pitt sat himself in one of the club chairs. Too much adrenaline was still pumping in his blood to sleep. The paperwork generated at the conference held no interest, so instead he removed the Isaac Bell's type-written notes from its plastic sleeve.

Not one to dwell on his own past, he didn't think about his role in discovering and salvaging the *Titanic*. Instead, he thought about a miner named Joshua Hayes Brewster and how he had driven himself mad in his quest to get his cargo back to the United States. Pitt recalled that when he'd pieced together Brewster's story, there had been some nagging questions about parts of the tale. He remembered thinking it was too fantastic that a miner from Colorado could have pulled off one of the greatest capers in history and yet the evidence of Brewster's success was undeniable. But maybe, Pitt thought, he hadn't sussed out the whole story, maybe Bell's version would shed some light on what had really taken place more than a hundred years earlier.

Pitt adjusted the lamp and started reading