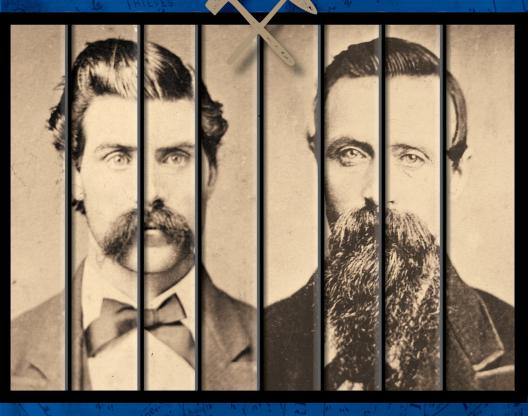
National Book Award Finalist

STEVE SHEINKIN

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LINCOLN VAULT



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STEVE SHEINKIN

Prologue



A passenger train rattled through the woods of western Pennsylvania late one summer night in 1864. In the rear car sat a man with a black beard. Iron shackles and chains bound his wrists and ankles. Armed guards sat on either side of him.

The train was on its way to Washington, DC. Pete McCartney was headed for the dreaded Old Capitol Prison. Or so it appeared.

The prisoner turned and looked through the open door at the rear of the car. Judging by the speed the train slid past moonlit clumps of trees, he figured they were doing thirtyfive miles an hour. A bit fast for what he needed to do.

He glanced at the guards, one seated beside him, another across the aisle. Each seemed lost in his own thoughts.

McCartney sprang up. He stumbled and slid on short steps, chains clanking, down the aisle and through the open door. The guards dashed onto the platform just in time to see the prisoner dive over the side and smack the gravel slope along the tracks—and disappear into the darkness.

One of the soldiers lunged for the alarm cord strung along the side of the car. The steam whistle on the roof let loose an earsplitting blast and the train began screeching to a stop.

"What is it?" asked a startled passenger.

"McCartney has escaped!" yelled one of the guards.

"And who is McCartney?"

"How has he escaped?"

"Gone out at the car door!" the guard shouted.

"When?"

"Now-this moment!"

"While the train was in motion?" asked a stunned conductor.

"Confound that fellow!" grunted one of the guards as he jumped from the slowing train.

"Well, he's smashed every bone in his skin, at all events," the other said as he jumped.

They hurried back along the dark tracks, swinging

lanterns, expecting to come quickly to the prisoner's mangled body. But there was no sign of him.

"I was hurt, of course," McCartney later said of his midnight leap. "But I fled to the woods, waited till all was quiet, and the train had gone, struggled along for hours, skulked and secreted myself, and with a stone finally smashed the iron shackles from my limbs."

McCartney was hungry, bruised as a rotting apple, and lost somewhere in the forest far from home. But he wasn't going to jail. And that's all that mattered.

This was far from his first escape.

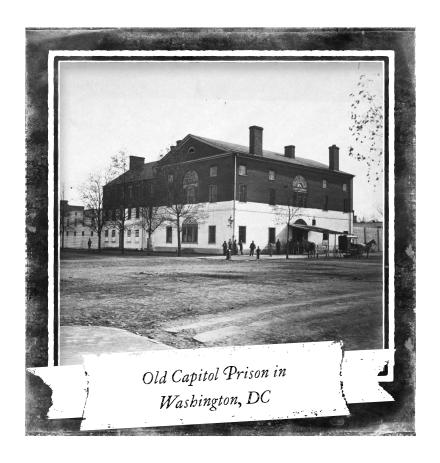
Pete McCartney was a counterfeiter—a coney man, as government agents called them. He'd been arrested many times for making and passing fake money, but had always found ways to wriggle free. McCartney busted out of one prison by patiently collecting foil from the insides of tobacco packages, melting the metal with a candle, and molding it into a key to his jail cell. Usually his method of escape was a lot simpler: He bought his way out.

"I was always a cash man, you know," McCartney

bragged. "I have paid away over \$70,000 first and last, in good money, to escape the clutches of the law." He wasn't sure he could bribe his way out of the Old Capitol Prison, which explains the dangerous train escape. "I was aware there was risk in jumping from the cars when the train was flying along at such a rate," he explained. "But then, we have to take risks as we meet with them."

After such a close call on the train, McCartney tried to go straight. He drifted back to his native Midwest and opened a photography studio. Then he moved to another town and bought a livery stable. Knowing the police were after him, he couldn't stay in one place. "I practiced dentistry for a while," he said, "but this was too slow for me." He even earned money as a traveling lecturer, giving talks on the art of detecting counterfeit currency.

But the lure of easy money was too strong—he started counterfeiting again. "I shoved a good many notes as I traveled," admitted McCartney. "The officers got on my trail." He was arrested in Cincinnati, escaped, was recaptured in Illinois and taken to jail in the state capital of Springfield.



When the news reached Washington, DC, an excited Herman Whitley hopped on a train and headed west. An ex-Union Army officer, Whitley was now chief of the United States Secret Service, a new government agency in charge of battling counterfeiters. He knew all about Pete McCartney, and was eager to question him.

Whitley's interview with the coney man was a bit disappointing. McCartney offered to turn over his stash of bogus cash, but refused to squeal on other well-known counterfeiters.

The chief got up to leave.

"You won't leave me here, I suppose?" McCartney asked, seeming surprised.

"Yes, for the present," said Whitley. "You're safe here."

"Oh, I can get out of this place easy enough," McCartney said, grinning. "I have done so before, and I can do it again."

"I guess not," Whitley said.

"Where are you stopping, Colonel?"

Whitley mentioned the name of his hotel.

"Your number?"

"Room twenty-four."

"Thank you," said McCartney. "I will call on you, at ten."

Whitley smiled. He could enjoy a good joke, even from a crook. "Good night," he said.

At ten o'clock that night, Whitley was sitting at the desk in his hotel room, writing up a report. There was a gentle knock on the door. "Come in," said the chief.

The door opened. A voice sang out, "Good evening, Colonel!"

Whitley turned to his guest. "McCartney!" he shouted, drawing his revolver. "How are you here?"

"Put up your shootin' iron, Colonel," McCartney said.
"I merely called to pay my respects. I am going back, of course."

And McCartney really did walk back to prison. Smiling all the way.

Herman Whitley never did figure out how McCartney got out of jail that night. However he did it, the stunt illustrated a serious challenge facing the U.S. government in the 1870s. The Secret Service was absolutely *determined* to catch counterfeiters and keep them behind bars. But coney men were just as eager to get free—and they were good at it, too.



On a freezing morning in February 1875, Patrick Tyrrell hopped off a streetcar in downtown Chicago, Illinois. A massive fire had gutted the city just four years before, but Chicago was already roaring back to life. Stone buildings were rising all around, and the wide sidewalks were jammed

with people in a hurry.

Tyrrell stepped through the doors of the newly rebuilt Palmer House hotel and stood in the cavernous lobby. With its shining marble, glittering chandeliers, and columns reaching up to soaring ceilings, the





place looked more like an overgrown palace than a hotel. But Tyrrell wasn't here to admire the architecture. He asked a clerk for the room number of his boss, the new Secret Service chief Elmer Washburn.

A powerfully built man with thick black hair, Tyrrell had spent his adult life chasing down crooks as a Chicago detective. Now forty-four, he was one of the newest operatives of the United States Secret Service. He knew all about coney men like Pete McCartney. It was his job to put them out of business.

The operative found Washburn's room, and the two men sat down to talk. The subject was the usual one: counterfeiters, and how to nab them. Specifically, Washburn had taken the train from Washington to talk to Tyrrell about a particularly dangerous coney man, an expert engraver, and brother-in-law to Pete McCartney. The man was an even bigger thorn in the government's side than McCartney. In fact, he was a threat to the nation's entire economic system.

His name was Benjamin Boyd.

Born in Cincinnati in 1834, Boyd was the son of a master



engraver—engravers cut designs and pictures into metal plates, and the plates were then used to make prints on paper. Young Ben showed interest in his father's craft, and obvious artistic talent. When Ben was still a teenager, his father set him up to study with one of the city's best engravers. The plan was that one day Ben would take over the family business.

Other Cincinnati engravers noticed Boyd's skill, and one of them, Nat Kinsey, offered to teach the kid a few advanced techniques. Kinsey was known for his beautifully intricate engravings of landscapes. It was less well known that with that same steady hand and attention to detail, he also cut plates to print counterfeit money.

Ben was tempted by the idea of making money—literally *making* it. And he learned quickly from Kinsey. At the age of twenty, hunched over the desk in his room at his father's house, he cut his first two counterfeit plates: the front and back of a \$20 bill.

The quality of this twenty was Boyd's ticket into the secret world of counterfeiting. He hopped around the Midwest, cutting plates and printing "coney." Distributors bought the goods from him, usually for at least 15 percent of the fake money's face value. Distributors then doubled the price and sold the bills to "shovers," whose job it was to pass the counterfeit cash in stores and banks.

The potential profits were enormous. From just one set of \$50 plates, Boyd printed \$265,000—about \$6 million in today's money! But it was a risky way to get rich. Boyd was

arrested in Iowa in 1859, and sentenced to two years in the state penitentiary.

After his release, Boyd moved to Illinois and went right back to cutting counterfeit plates. He partnered with Pete McCartney and they set up a workshop in Mattoon.

At some point in the early 1860s, Boyd met a young woman named Almiranda Ackman, a pretty brunette, according to a later Secret Service report. Allie's father was yet another talented engraver gone wrong. Allie and her sister, Martha, had grown up helping their dad print and pass coney in Indianapolis. Pete McCartney married Martha, and Ben fell for Allie.

Ben and Allie started working together—he made the bills, she carried them to distributors in her straw shopping basket. Secret Service agents tracked the fake money to Mattoon and busted Boyd in his workshop. At the same time, another team of agents burst into a nearby hotel and grabbed Allie Ackman. When detectives searched Allie's basket, they found \$30,000 in phony fifties, twenties, and tens.

It was a tight spot, but Ben managed to get both himself

and his girl off the hook by agreeing to hand over a set of plates for printing \$50 bills. The beautifully cut plates had taken about a year of painstaking labor to make.

Free again, Ben and Allie were married in Michigan. From 1865 to 1875 the Boyds kept out of sight. Boyd wasn't a show-off like his brother-in-law, Pete; he preferred to lay low and work. And he was so good, so valuable to his business partners, they spared no expense to protect and hide him.

But the Secret Service knew Boyd was still out there somewhere, and they knew he was still working, because his nearly perfect counterfeit money kept showing up all over the Midwest. Boyd's masterpiece was a \$5 bill that even some experts couldn't tell was fake. As one official report put it: "He is considered the best letterer on steel in the country, or the world."

After reviewing the case, Secret Service Chief Washburn gave Patrick Tyrrell his new assignment. He was to track down Ben Boyd and get him dead to rights—grab him with incriminating evidence on him. The capture of Boyd,

Washburn said, would snap the backbone of counterfeiting in the United States.

A veteran of the Chicago police department, Tyrrell knew how things worked in the real world. He needed information about Boyd, and he went to the only people who had it—criminals. Tyrrell contacted Ben's old teacher, Nat Kinsey. Kinsey was down on his luck, and ready to sell out an old pal for the right price.

"I am in need of money in the worst way," Kinsey wrote to Tyrrell in one of the many letters they exchanged.

For the next eight months, Tyrrell saw very little of his wife and children in Chicago. Following tips from Kinsey and other paid informers, the operative followed Boyd's winding trail through Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois. He discovered that Boyd had lived briefly in Decatur, Illinois, as Charles Mitchell, and as B. F. Wilson in Des Moines, Iowa. In September, Tyrrell learned, the so-called B.F. Wilson and his wife had left Iowa for Fulton, Illinois, where they rented a white house near the banks of the Mississippi River.

Tyrrell headed for Fulton. He found the windows of the

Wilsons' house covered by thick green curtains, always drawn. Neighbors said Mrs. Wilson was sometimes seen going to the market, but Mr. Wilson never showed his face. Another man, though, was often seen coming and going.

This other man was Nat Kinsey. He was helping Boyd cut plates—and secretly sending Tyrrell updates from inside his old student's house.

Tyrrell needed to move quickly. But not too quickly. He had Boyd cornered now, and wanted to give his prey time to settle in, to feel safe. He wanted Boyd to start working on a new set of counterfeit plates. He wanted to catch Boyd in the act.

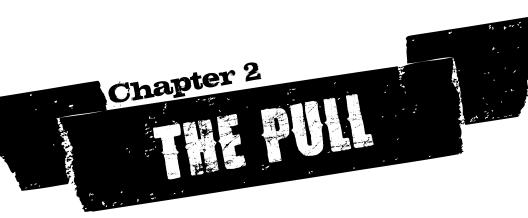
On October 18, Tyrrell rented a hotel room in Lyons, Iowa, across the river from Fulton. He spent a couple days watching Boyd's street, studying the layout of the surrounding blocks. Two days later, Kinsey took the ferry over to Lyons and found Tyrrell in his room. Good news, Kinsey said. Boyd had started work on a new set of \$20 plates.

Tyrrell and Kinsey set their plan. The next morning,

V. S. Breasury Department, Ches Moines District, Lyons Soma October 21 1875 Olmer Washburn Esqu Chief of the W. S. S. S. I have the honor to submit my report as Chief Operator of this District for the 21st day of Colober 1075; This morning in company with James I Breaks and John M' Donald of Chiergo, we start werefs the River to South, each is appoint o certain duty, and at gochock all is really at the place designated, after a few moment delay, hip, appears and gives me the signal agreed when promptly each takes the place afigued, I enter, The dear being left pon Boyd, giving her in the Street I proceed up stones and meet benjamin Boyd, at the head of the stories I inform A page from Tyrrell's daily report to Chief Washburn

Kinsey would be at the house. As Tyrrell approached, Kinsey would signal from the window, letting the operative know whether or not Boyd was at work on his plates. If he was, the raid would proceed. If not, they'd wait. Tyrrell handed Kinsey a twenty, and told him that if all went well they would not speak again.

In his daily report to Chief Washburn, he wrote: "I then arranged to make the pull at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning."



Early the next morning, Tyrrell tucked his revolver into its holster and left his hotel room. With him were two other armed men in suits, Secret Service agents James Brooks and John McDonald. They walked to the waterfront, got on a ferry, and headed across the Mississippi River.

A few minutes before 9:00, Tyrrell and the other operatives approached Boyd's house on foot. Kinsey leaned out an upstairs window and gave the go-ahead signal.

Tyrrell opened the fence gate in front of the house and walked around toward the back door. Brooks followed close behind, while McDonald hung back to cover the front door.

Suddenly a man raced up in a wagon and screamed, loud enough to be heard inside the house:

"Does B. F. Wilson live here?"

Then the driver took off without waiting for an answer.

Instantly Tyrrell knew—they'd been spotted by Boyd's friends, and that shouted question was a warning to Boyd.

Yelling for the others to stay outside and watch the exits, Tyrrell sprinted to the back door. Just as he was reaching for the doorknob, a man stumbled out, almost crashing into Tyrrell on his way down the steps. It was Kinsey, on his way out.

Tyrrell charged through the empty kitchen and into the dining room, running full-speed into Allie Boyd. Allie grabbed Tyrrell's coat collar, trying to keep him in the room.

"Brooks!" shouted Tyrrell, yanking the woman's strong hands off his collar.

James Brooks bolted in and Tyrrell shoved Allie into his arms. Then Tyrrell spun and ran to the stairs, and was just starting up when he stopped short. Standing at the top of the steps with a startled look on his face was Benjamin Boyd.

Tyrrell pulled out his pistol and said, "Boyd, you are my prisoner."

"Who are you?" growled Boyd.

"United States Detective Tyrrell."

"I have heard of you, Tyrrell," Boyd said, glaring down at the agent.

Tyrrell walked up the steps, holstering his revolver. He slapped handcuffs on Boyd's wrists, then shouted out the window for McDonald, still in the yard, to come inside. While McDonald and Brooks guarded the prisoners, Tyrrell began the search for incriminating evidence.

It was everywhere.

The spare bedroom upstairs was clearly being used as a workroom—there was a large table, with engraving tools scattered around, as if the worker had just been interrupted. More tools were piled in crates on the floor. Tyrrell lifted a black metal plate from the worktable. Cut into the metal was the partially finished design of the front of a U.S. \$20 bill. On the desk, right beside where the plate had been, was a real \$20 bill.

Tyrrell hurried into town to telegraph the good news to Chief Washburn. When he returned to the house to search the downstairs, McDonald reported an interesting development. While Tyrrell was gone, Allie Boyd had offered McDonald \$1,000 in cash to let her take something out of the house.

Tyrrell turned to Allie. What was it she didn't want him to find?

She hesitated, sighed, and pointed to a box in the corner. Tyrrell searched it and found nothing interesting. Then he noticed the box had a fat wooden handle. He cracked it open. Inside, in a tightly rolled bundle, was \$7,824 in real U.S. currency.

The search went on for six more hours. "I found a small box," Tyrrell reported. "On breaking it up I found a front and back for a one hundred dollar treasury note." Wrapped in a coat under the Boyds' bed he found partly finished and blank metal plates. In a crate, under a pile of rags, was a plate expertly engraved with the back of a \$20 bill—the reverse side of the plate found on Ben's desk.

That afternoon Tyrrell and the other agents packed up the evidence and headed to the train station with their prisoners. They all sat together on the train back to Chicago.

Ben Boyd kept glancing at the crate of counterfeit plates





Examples of United States paper currency from 1880

by Tyrrell's feet. There was enough evidence in there to put him away for a long stretch. He turned to the operative.

"Tyrrell," Boyd began, "you are not long in the Secret Service, are you?"

"No, not long," Tyrrell answered. "Why? Anything the matter?"

"Oh, I thought if you were an old member of the Service, you would take the property now in your possession and let me skip out the back door."

Tyrrell shook his head. "But that is not my way of doing business."

Boyd figured as much. Like other counterfeiters, he'd bribed his way out of jams before. But these new Secret Service agents were annoyingly honest.

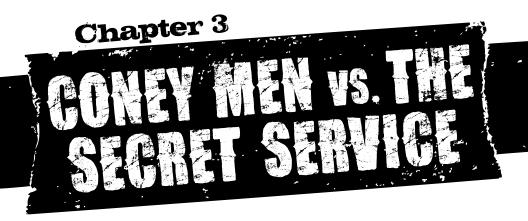
As if to prove the point, Tyrrell asked Boyd what he wanted done with the money that had been hidden in the hollow box handle. Boyd asked that it be put in the bank, for use by his defense lawyer. To Boyd's amazement, Tyrrell deposited every penny.

Boyd was convinced he wasn't going to be able to buy his freedom.

Plan B was to escape. While awaiting trial in Cook County jail, Boyd and another counterfeiter in the cell tried to make a key to the cell lock. A guard found the half-cut key and confiscated it.

It was beginning to look like Ben Boyd was going to spend a very long time behind bars.





It began with seashells.

The earliest form of American-made money was wampum—beads made from white and purple seashells, and strung into decorative belts by Native Americans of the Northeast. Back in the early 1600s, before colonies had their own coins or paper bills, settlers and Indians used wampum belts as a form of currency. The belts could be exchanged for different amounts of goods, depending on size and design. Purple beads, for instance, were worth a bit more than white, because the shells needed to make them were harder to find. Pretty soon, America's first counterfeiters were dying white shells and passing them off as purple.

The colony of Massachusetts was the first to set up a mint, and began issuing silver coins in 1652. Counterfeiters immediately began making pewter copies.

The same happened with early paper currency, thanks to resourceful folks like Mary Butterworth of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Butterworth, a mother of seven, used the family kitchen as her workroom. First she'd get her iron good and hot in the fire. Then she'd put a genuine paper bill on the table and cover it with a damp cloth. As she ran the iron over the cloth, some of the ink from the money was transferred to the cloth. Quickly and carefully, she laid the cloth on a blank piece of paper and pressed down hard with her iron. This transferred the ink from the cloth to the paper, leaving a perfect outline of the original currency's design. Butterworth always threw her used cloths into the fire after using them. The final step was to use a fine quill pen to darken the design on the fake bill, and fill in the lettering.

Beginning in about 1715, Butterworth spent seven years producing a fortune in counterfeit Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut currency. Her brothers and other relatives acted as distributors, selling the bills for half their face value—unusually high for coney, which means that her fakes were of very high quality. The bills

were finally noticed and traced to her house, but the courtordered search turned up no evidence. It was all in ashes in her kitchen fireplace.

In the decades after the American Revolution, the U.S. government produced gold and silver coins, but no national paper currency. Counterfeiters didn't mind—coins were easier to fake. Simply take a real coin and make a mold of the design. Then melt a cheap metal, pour it into the mold, let it harden, and cover the fake coin with a thin plate of real gold or silver. Those who really cared about doing quality work took the extra time to give their coins a handled, tarnished look by rubbing them with sawdust and burning them with fire.

The process wasn't technically challenging, but each coin took time, and each required genuine gold or silver. Counterfeiting coins was a small-time criminal enterprise. As a result, fake coins weren't a huge problem—in 1860, the government figured that less than 2 percent of the coins in circulation were phony.

Counterfeiting went big-time during the Civil War,

which started in 1861. As war ripped the country apart, the U.S. government suddenly needed piles of cash to pay millions of soldiers and buy supplies for the massive Union Army. Congress responded with the Legal Tender Act, and President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law. The new law gave the U.S. Treasury the power to print paper currency. Government printing presses started pumping out hundreds of millions of dollars.

And counterfeiters started copying it.

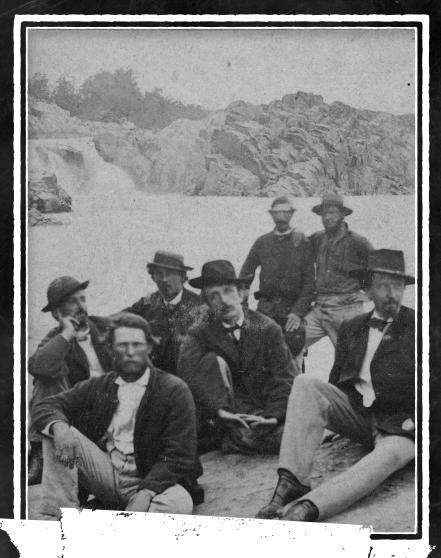
Making fake paper money was a lot trickier than making coins. For a successful operation, you needed a whole network of distributors and shovers to spread the coney in various cities. You needed lots of cash to put together the team, and to pay for the most vital member—a talented, experienced engraver. But none of this discouraged coney men, since the potential payoff was so great. By 1864 an astounding 50 percent of the paper money in circulation was fake.

This was becoming a gigantic problem for honest business owners. Say you own a store, and a guy comes in and buys five dollars' worth of stuff. He pays with a twenty, and you give him fifteen dollars in change. But then, when you go worthless. So you've lost the five bucks' worth of goods and the fifteen you gave in change.

Americans were beginning to lose faith in the green slips of paper. And if citizens stopped trusting the currency, there'd be no way for the government to pay for the war. The entire economy would collapse. A very frightened Treasury Department responded in 1865 by creating the Secret Service, and charging the agency with leading the fight against counterfeiters. Today we think of Secret Service agents as the guys in dark suits protecting the president, but that happened later. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, then President James Garfield in 1881, and then President William McKinley in 1901. Only then did it occur to Congress that someone should be guarding the president, and they gave the job to the Secret Service.

Back in the 1870s, the one and only task of the Secret Service was to stop the counterfeiters.

On January 19, 1876, Ben and Allie Boyd went on trial in



Secret Service agents in 1865

a Chicago courtroom packed with spectators. As Tyrrell and others testified against the defendants, Allie held a handkerchief to her eyes, weeping pathetically. For some reason, the judge bought her act.

"After hearing the evidence in the case," Tyrrell grumbled, "the judge ordered the jury to find Almiranda Boyd not guilty, it being conceded that she was the wife of Benjamin Boyd and that as such she had only done what was her duty to her husband by covering up his guilt as much as possible."

Allie was acquitted, but the jury took just twenty minutes to find Ben Boyd guilty. The judge sentenced him to ten years in Joliet State Prison.

The conviction was a huge win for the Secret Service. As a reward for busting Boyd, Chief Washburn promoted Tyrrell to chief operative of the Chicago District of the Secret Service, covering the states of Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin. A nice honor, but it wasn't going to make his life any easier.

Tyrrell hung a map of his vast territory on the wall of his Chicago office. With just a few agents working under him,

he was now responsible for a chunk of land the size of a small country. There were a lot of coney men still out there, Tyrrell knew, and they were sure to strike back.

But in a million years, he never could have guessed how they were going to do it.

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