

THE PLUNDERERS



BOOK FOUR OF THE "BASE 211" SERIES

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PROLOGUE

In 1946 a British military operation took place in Antarctica, with an elite commando unit being sent to search for, and destroy, a secret Nazi fortress called "Base 211". Two of the survivors of this failed attempt, codenamed Radar & The Norwegian, escaped with their lives but soon had to go on the run after being double crossed by their superiors, both now deemed expendable because they knew too much...

Traveling from Patagonia all the way up through South America they soon stumbled upon a network of Nazi outposts and colonies. harbouring both military and scientific personnel that had escaped war torn Europe.

The enemy's presence there had been established long before the end of the war, as with the prospect of probable defeat the German hierarchy had made preparations for a full-scale evacuation of all key personnel, along with the movement of all assets, including vast amounts of capital. A hidden fleet of U boats no longer engaged in naval warfare were secretly used to transport huge quantities of gold and equipment out of Germany to safe havens overseas. Once most of the vital cargo had been moved, and all the infrastructure had been completed, tens of thousands of Nazi personnel were next transported across, completely undetected under the seas. Previous to this cohort, top scientists with key knowledge and advanced technology had already been sent to several bases located deep underground in Antarctica, where they continued their research and development with unlimited resources. Once finished here many of them were later seconded to the various new projects being set up all across South America.

Secret assimilation centres were also established, initially for Nazi war criminals but later for all migrating officers, to help with their integration into either South or North American societies. Their main focus was to improve language skills, cultural awareness, organise future work placement, establish new identities and allocate undercover missions for each agent.

For those officers who were planned to be fast tracked into American society, accommodation was provided through a chain of exclusive “Hotel”s. Their assimilation process was conducted over a twelve week program, with the nominated candidates continuing to live there long after they had graduated, until such time they received orders for their future deployment. Each Hotel had a state of the art medical facility in the basement, which specialised in revolutionary plastic surgery. Once this procedure had been completed and all had healed, the next stage was a comprehensive training program to help them seamlessly integrate into the society that they had been assigned to infiltrate.

Radar & the Norwegian’s successful sabotage of such assimilation centres, along with the destruction of other bases and outposts, only increased their enemy’s efforts in trying to eliminate them; hunting them across the Americas and all the way up to the Arctic Circle. They were relentless in their pursuit, until eventually the men found safety in the sanctuary of a new alliance.

After a further series of fantastic adventures that immersed them into previously unknown worlds, they next encountered a new evil axis, whose terrifying agenda threatened to bring armageddon to the world and plunge mankind into oblivion. Following their timely intervention and new found skills in diplomacy, a temporary truce was eventually secured, allowing them and their allies time to regroup, with peace being restored.

However, new intelligence now suggested that there were very serious concerns of a resurgence of the old enemy, who were increasingly more active in their clandestine activities, the end game of which remained a total mystery. Thus, without further delay, the two heroes were called upon again, to seek out and identify the new threat, and help neutralise the enemy once and for all.

1) INDIANA

“Welcome race fans to the world famous Indy 500, the greatest spectacle of speed you will ever see, here in the fabulous city of Indianapolis! I’m Sidney Blatter, and our broadcast today is brought to you by ‘Pete’s Perfect Pistons’, who can meet all of your automobile needs! And from the trusted Triple P we bring you Triple A Championship racing with the first round of the 1947 season! This is the main blue ribbon event of the year, and the 31st to be staged at this prestigious International 500 Mile Speedway! We have a fantastic bumper crowd of over 165 000 fans, already providing an electric atmosphere, all eagerly waiting to cheer on their heroes in this exhilarating crucible of speed! Together with our team of roving reporters at trackside we will be broadcasting live coverage nationwide of both the start and the finish of the race, with updates throughout of the changing positions, scoring, and all the drama as it happens! And Ladies and gentlemen, what a race we have for you today! Thirty of the finest and bravest drivers in the world, with nerves of steel and lightning speed reflexes, all competing in their sleek silver steeds for twenty laps around this two and a half mile oval, to see who will be crowned this year’s winner of the legendary Indy 500!” boomed the increasingly excitable voice of the veteran anchorman, whose polished script and warm treacle tone soothed the anxiety of all of his impatient listeners, yearning for the commencement of proceedings.

“What took you so long? I’ve been gasping for a drink for ages. I’m literally sweltering in this infernal oven, and trust you to pick seats right under the tannoy speaker! That bloody Yank is going to give us a headache all afternoon! Did you remember to place the bets on?” snapped a hot and bothered Radar, who as soon as he spoke realised his uncharacteristic and completely unnecessary petulant tone, now looking up at his friend with an innocent and imploring look of forgiveness.

“Relax, of course I did! Two bucks on driver number 24, ‘Shorty Cantlon’, for you and two bucks on driver number 1, ‘Ted Horn’, for me” the Norwegian regaled reassuringly, not reacting to his heat induced outburst, and holding up their betting slips triumphantly, waving them in the air as if they had already won.

“You didn’t go for the pole sitter! That’s a rookie mistake on this track, anyone else in the top ten has a chance, but being on pole is usually a curse! My bet qualified fifth and looks in real good shape!” enthused Radar as if he was a racing expert, having just read their racing program cover to cover whilst he waited for his comrade’s eventual return with their drinks.

Taking a cup of cool beer from the Norwegian’s outstretched arm he gratefully raised it high in a salute of appreciation before taking a long refreshing swig as his friend joined him, sitting down right on the end of the row of seats by the aisle. Basking under the shade of the stands’ protective roof, they both looked down from their upper row seats to the sea of fans below, trying to scan the faces in each block, desperately prospecting through the multitude in search of the one particular profile.

The men had been on his trail for a few days, a seemingly insignificant low level ranking officer who they were surprised was so high up on the list of targets. They had already expressed their reservations to their coordinator, but previous covert observations of his presence at the locations of several covert meetings gave cause for concern, and indicated that he was probably more closely linked and engaged with the highest level of nefarious activities of the enemy than his alleged lowly position suggested. They had shadowed him closely and followed his conspicuous itinerary, seemingly acting as just an average tourist, visiting typical landmarks and popular events along the way. He was always alone and constantly made sure that he remained in busy open crowded places, with his latest trail leading them to the big race, as previously predicted by their coordinator. Having successfully followed him undetected from the parking lot to the ticket stall, the men had decided to hang back and wait, trying to blend in before planning their next move.

“There’s our pigeon, over there, the white linen suit with a Panama hat a few rows up from the front on the very far right!” whispered the Norwegian under his breath, pretending to study the racing form in the program in front of his face as he spoke.

“Oh yeah, I see him! With that suit it shouldn’t be too hard to spot him in a busy crowd when he leaves. Look, he has a spare seat next to him again as if he is meeting someone. That’s the third time he’s done that. either he is being stood up each time, or he is being ultra-careful in not being caught out by any potential spies like us!” speculated Radar with a low voice, conscious of any potential eavesdroppers nearby, as he too pointed at the program to feign interest.

“I think you’re right, he’s certainly a cautious fellow, that’s for sure! He never acts or looks suspicious, always calm and collected, very professional indeed. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was an undercover agent during the war” continued the Norwegian as he continued to share the prop of the program and pointed out a picture on a random page to Radar as part of their cover.

“I’ve been thinking, do you think he’s onto us? All these venues without any show, are the empty seats each time an indicator of aborted meetings because he’s detected our presence?” questioned Radar with slight concern that they had somehow been too clumsy along the way.

“Could be the case, but I haven’t seen him give any obvious signals to indicate that, or sighted any possible contacts in the near vicinity. I’m sure we have been more than diligent! To be honest, I think he would just disappear into thin air if he thought that there was someone watching him.

I’m sure he’s just going through the motions of being careful, very careful indeed. You’re right though, there could well be a subtle visual code he uses to alert an observer to his concern of being tailed, or a green light for them to proceed” speculated the Norwegian.

“Like wearing a carnation upside down on his right lapel instead of upright on his left lapel!” exclaimed Radar, slightly louder than he intended, which prompted both men to look around for any potential reaction from the other patrons nearby, who were totally oblivious and were just focused on their own private conversations.

“Well spotted! I can’t believe that I missed that, it certainly does look odd pinned on his jacket that way. Fingers crossed that really is a sign for his next contact’s benefit, like you say, hopefully signaling a green light for their scheduled liaison!” eulogised the optimistic Norwegian, taking another swig of his cool brew.

As the men patiently waited and watched from afar, their quarry sat motionless, not interacting with any of the fans around him, staring straight ahead without any apparent concern for the proceedings. After an excruciatingly long period of time, in which nothing of note happened, there was a sudden seismic roar of multiple engines flexing their pistons and ripping up the idle chatter into shreds of fallen silence. As the gladiators announced their presence in the arena, their fanfare was reciprocated by an even louder collective cheer from all of the fans in the surrounding stands, creating an unerring wall of deafening sound.

The smell of oil, petrol fumes, and burning rubber soon filled the crowd’s nostrils and fuelled their excitement even further, even spreading its infectious euphoria to the two men, who could not restrain their wide smiles of wonder at the drama unfolding. After a warm up lap that preceded every race, all the cars lined up into their positions and came to a complete stop, waiting for the final countdown.

“Gentlemen! Start your engines!” boomed the proud voice of the race director, which instantly triggered a joint cacophony of both engine noise and cheering crowds in rising unison.

This raucous cries soon became even more thunderous with the emergence of a short fat old man waddling along the track, exuding the

epitome of Uncle Sam. Rippling like a literal living flag, with his blue suit, white shirt, red waistcoat and red tie, topped off with a ten gallon white top hat, as he marched confidently to the allotted position. Clearly reveling in the wave of adulation and applause, he responded by starting an elaborate little dance, rotating his checkered flag in time with his moves, which sent the ecstatic fans into an even higher crescendo, as the chariots launched furiously into combat.

The men tried to remain focused on their target who was not presenting any differently than he had done before the race started, still sat in the same rigid statuesque position, seemingly immune to the tidal euphoria swirling around him. However much they tried, the perpetual overstimulation was irresistible, and they could not help being carried away with the electric atmosphere and thrilling spectacle before them. Gripping onto their individual betting slips tightly, their eyes were split between the blur of their adopted car number whizzing past them on the straight ahead, and the stationary white Panama hat at the corner of their other eye.

As the race progressed the men's backed drivers were ahead of most of the field, racing with a small group that lapped the other lesser drivers with ease, negotiating the bends at breakneck speeds of over 120 mph, with heartstopping overtaking maneuvers that ignited the loudest of cheers of appreciation. Suddenly, an unusual movement caught the attention of the Norwegian, who discreetly tapped his friend on the leg and subtly pointed at waist level in the direction of their target.

"Look! He's just waved over one of the refreshment vendors, the popcorn man with the red and white striped apron and silly little hat, and he's now making a beeline straight to him!" exclaimed the Norwegian under his breath with excited anticipation.

"That's more than a bit fishy, he's ignoring the rest of the audience trying to get his attention along the way and going straight to him. We best both keep a close eye to see what's going on here!" chipped in Radar with equal enthusiasm.

As they both intently watched the staged interaction, their target specifically pointed to one of the tall cardboard boxes of popcorn sat nestled in the vendor's tray, that was tightly strapped over his shoulders and resting on his protruding belly. Their target handed over a cash bill, and automatically waved away the offer of any change being given back. The vendor proceeded to tuck the money into his top shirt pocket, giving a quick suspicious look to his left and right, before selecting the specific box selected from the back row of the tray, and carefully handed it over to the target.

Moving swiftly away without any further interaction with the target, and rudely avoiding eye contact with the multitude of impatient customers trying to gain his attention, he quickly departed from the grandstand and disappeared out of sight down the exit ramp to the outside concession area. Without looking around, or even trying any of its tasty contents, the target casually placed the box on the floor next to his right foot and continued to stare ahead. As the top three drivers roared past the main stand again he used their cover to discreetly kick the box over, spilling most of its contents on the floor between his last seat in the row and the end wall. As the men curiously watched, he reached down with two hands, raising the half empty box high with his left hand, and as he did so his right hand expertly slipped an item he picked up from the floor straight into the inside pocket of his open linen jacket.

“There you go, did you see that! That was the switch, he just scooped something from the spilt box into his jacket!” exclaimed Radar triumphantly, with a feeling of success that they had finally caught their man red handed.

“Yes! I saw it too! I couldn’t tell what it was though, could you?” queried the Norwegian earnestly.

“No, but now the exchange has occurred he will no doubt lead us further down the rabbit hole!” joked the buoyant Radar.

The Norwegian laughed and took a final swig of beer before pointing to one of the cars in the race ahead.

“That Bill Holland in car number 16 seems to have the edge today, I think he’s led most of the laps so far, looks like we should have bet on him instead!” he mused reflectively.

“I’ve got a good feeling about our boys, they’re still up there in second and third place, and it’s a long old race! Don’t you worry, there’s still time yet for our bets to come in!” reassured Radar in a somewhat defensive tone, waving his slip in a defiant and somewhat partisan manner.

Just as he finished talking, they both turned to watch the track and stared down in horror at the shocking incident unfolding before them. One of the back markers being lapped inexplicably slowed down for a bend causing the overtaking lead car of Bill Holland to accidentally clip his rear tyre, sending Bill into a dizzying spin which he desperately fought to control. This in turn caused chaos behind him, as car number 24 driven by Shorty Cantlon, who was closely following Bill, swerved to avoid collision with the spinning car. He himself then lost control and veered violently to the right and straight into the concrete perimeter wall at over 100 mph. The sound of the gut-wrenching impact and subsequent explosion drew a collective gasp from the shocked crowd, with the following moments pregnant silence soon punctured by the high pitched screams of several female spectators.

Finally, an eerie somber silence swept across all who bore witness to the remaining carnage of twisted metal, knowing all too well that there could be no survival from such a horrendous crash.

The procession of following cars were waved yellow flags and immediately slowed down, all be it for just for a few laps, as the emergency services and clean-up operation rapidly sprang into action. From the central grassy island in the middle of the oval two stewards with a stretcher quickly ran up the steep camber of the track and extracted the prone body of the driver from the mangled wreckage, which was unceremoniously rolled onto the

waiting canvas, before they hurriedly carried it back down the slope to the waiting parked ambulance on the grass. Quickly depositing the deceased into the back, the vehicle remained ominously stationary, its primary role clearly redundant, now acting just as a temporary storage unit. As soon as the two carriers had left the track the next steward ran towards the fatal scene, with his red metal bucket of sand swinging as he trotted up, efficiently covering the long patch of spilt oil that stained the track, before running back down, expertly dodging the oncoming cars as he returned to the grassy sanctuary in the centre of the oval. The last member of the mop up crew carefully cleared the spray of surrounding debris, sweeping it towards the stricken wreck, which was just left there resting against the wall, waiting to be collected after the race. The yellow flags were soon furiously waved again for the race to resume, with the remaining drivers now subjected to the fixed image of their competitors' demise, having to pass the painful reminder of their possible fate for another 160 laps.

Eventually the soothing tone of the race commentator returned to the speakers and reassured the crowd to remain in their seats and that the race was continuing. Many had already taken the opportunity to leave the stands to seek refreshments, comfort breaks, or for the most squeamish to leave the event entirely. The race commentator then continued with a brief update to confirm the tragedy of Shorty's passing.

"Alas, death stalks the speedway, and lady luck was not kind to poor Shorty, who has sadly run his last race today" lamented the commentator, whose reflective voice was filled with genuine sorrow.

This poignant eulogy was immediately drowned out by the thunderous engines of the charging stallions, who zoomed past the tragic scene without care, the event now soon forgotten by most of the remaining crowd, battle hardened to such fatalities as an occupational hazard.

"Bloody typical!" cursed Radar, coldly ripping up his redundant betting slip, screwing it up into a ball and throwing it as hard as anyone could into the ground with heartless disdain.

After the moment had passed he quickly composed himself, suddenly realising how inappropriate his outburst was, and continued somewhat defensively.

“I suppose we have a chance of winning some money back on your pole sitter, it seems he’s still up there in the mix at the moment!” he said with renewed optimism, trying to sound more upbeat than before.

The bemused Norwegian gave a warm smile back as if to reassure him that any spoils won would be shared, himself being totally indifferent to the outcome. Although he didn’t hold it against his friend, deep down he found the lack of compassion for human life in this particular sport, to carry on racing regardless, was completely distasteful.

Tearing themselves from the consuming drama before them the men looked back down to where the Panama hat was now no longer sitting, both equally aghast at their momentary distraction that led to his unobserved exit. The target had obviously taken the opportunity to quickly disappear into the rolling sea of the thirsty and the hungry, who could not wait until the end of the race to sate their appetites, and had used this break in the action to migrate to the concession areas outside.

With uncharacteristic panic, the men dispensed with their previous polite and cautious approach of not drawing attention to themselves, and quickly made haste through the descending masses, rushing down the steps and pushing through gaps that weren’t always there, trying to get ahead of the thickening crowd and back onto the trail of their quarry.

They paused at the bottom of the stairs and looked left and right, frantically trying to spot their pale rider in the sea of gray suits and dark hats before them. However, the only white that distracted their eyes were the stripes in the spangled pattern of the triangular bunting that was hanging from the main stand, and the low picket fence that bordered it. Seeing a gap emerge ahead they both dived through the tunnel that sloped towards the exit, and

waded their way through the indolent, emerging through the other side with more caution in case their man should be loitering at the entrance.

The crowd now began to funnel out and disperse, providing them with less cover than before, but at the same time giving better scope of vision to try to find their target. Stood in the shadows of a large marble column they scanned the area ahead but found no sign of him in any of the queues at the concession stalls opposite the dividing road, or in any of the departing cars that were slowly meandering through the ignorant obstructive pedestrians. On closer inspection they could see that the majority of the license plates were not from Indiana but from a whole plethora of surrounding states, the event attracting fans from far afield.

Directly opposite them loomed several gigantic advertising boards with towering messages that advised sincerely and paternally from above, with bright stark images of sponsors for tyres, oil, various cigarettes, and one for the actual race itself. The latter displayed the beautiful face and curvy figure of Carole Landis, the glamorous film star who had been booked to give the cheque of 25 000 dollars and a big kiss to the eventual winner of the event, with the apt title above the image of her face: "Ain't life grand!".

On the end of this row of advertising boards stood a raised whitewashed wooden portacabin, with a black and white sign on the side with the boldly printed word "Telephones". As they both stared at the closed entrance to this building the door suddenly opened and out of the gloom strolled their man, trailed by a tide of fog from the copious cigarette smoke that had engulfed the room behind him. Unaware of their presence, he casually descended the short flight of steps and slowly ambled along the sidewalk towards a row of nearby parked cars.

"It seems our target has already been busy talking to someone about his spilled popcorn!" mused Radar with disdain.

"Come on, we best get back to our car quickly before we lose him again!" urged the Norwegian, sensing his imminent departure.