



THE
SKATEBOARD
DETECTIVES

Diamonds

are for Evil

ANDREW FUSEK
PETERS



工业学院图书馆
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**In memory of Miloš Vainer and with great
thanks**



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1. FLIGHT

Saturday 29 September, 2.45 am – the present

Break shuffled up to the ledge of the flat roof, pulled back his hood and peered over. The face that checked out the very long way down was framed by a mop of black hair. The skin was pale and hinted at too much food with a high grease content. Brown eyes nervously scanned the scene, looking for trouble.

Four storeys below, the shop fronts were shuttered and bolted. By day, this pedestrianised alley thronged with the rich and wannabe wealthy, looking to make the deal of a lifetime. Now there was only a staggering drunk, busy recycling his dinner onto the pavement. The man stumbled off and the gang were ready to go.

'No way,' Break hissed. Heights were not his thing.

Ben's rangy form was curled up in the corner, trying not to shiver. 'What do you mean?' he whispered back. 'You've done it before.'

'Falling into a river is one thing, but ending up as the filling in a concrete sandwich is another.' Break put his skateboard down and started scratching the scabs on his elbow. He'd popped some decent air in his time, but this was suicidal. His last jump had been a smooth nollie off a set of twelve steps. The move was good, and he had even managed to land at the bottom with a textbook tail manual. That's when it all went wrong: hitting the ground with two wheels followed by a perfect bloody elbow slide. Bad bailout. He had no desire to repeat the experience.

'Stop squabbling, you two,' said Charlie, with an exasperated look on her face. 'The point is, how do we get over?'

The sheer drop was bad enough and the vicious wind, whipping up the chip papers and ruffling their hair, didn't help matters. The gang looked across at their target - a flat roof on the other side of the alley, about ten metres below, the edge helpfully surrounded by razor wire. The gap

between the buildings would have tested the best long jumpers, but this was the point where the alley was narrowest.

'I say we forget about the whole thing! What we're doing isn't exactly legal. Most other teenagers would be tucked up with a decent computer game by now,' San muttered miserably, hugging his rucksack.

Ben stood up and pushed back his short dreadlocks. 'Don't be a wimp, Gadget Boy. It doesn't suit you. It looks like I'm the only one who's man enough to do the job!' He walked backwards across the roof, counting his steps. 'If I can get enough of a run up...' He bent down at the back edge and sprang forwards. One, two, three, four - by the fifth step he'd reached the edge and come to a perfect full stop, as he contemplated the drop below and the huge jump he might be mad enough to take on.

'Good. Let's do it. Charlie, have you got the rope?'

Charlie resented being dogsbody, but Ben was taking the risk. Fair enough. 'Here. Top Gun 8.1 mm. Should have no problem carrying us lot.' She began to unloop the coil to give Ben plenty of slack. The oversized satellite dish in the corner would provide anchor. She quickly attached one

end of the rope with a tautline hitch. 'Good luck!' she whispered as she handed the other end to Ben.

Ben was nervous as he began warming up. He stretched his hamstrings, made a few squats and circled his arms. 'The art of a good traceur is fluidity!' he said. 'Watch and learn. A saut de détente followed by a roulade should do it.'

'I'm sorry,' interrupted Break, pointing at his watch. 'Did we ask for a free-running lecture? Could the great Ben himself be scared?'

Ben frowned. Break was right. He was terrified. Once again he stepped back. Rehearsal time was over. He crouched down, feeling his heart beating double-time and the blood pumping in his veins. This was it. He wrapped the rope round his forearm and sprang forwards. Total focus now. Four steps, but the fifth was the one that counted. His knee bent and he ricocheted into space.

If the street drunk had bothered to look up, he would have seen a boy in flight and wondered if the booze was making him hallucinate.

For Ben, time crawled by. He could feel the dirty air of the city make a slipstream round his body. The street below was picked out in perfect detail, every streetlamp and jeweller's shop front, even the endless chewing gum acne

suffered by pavements the world over. This was the moment he lived for and the reason why birds were on to a good thing. Just for a split-second, he'd beaten gravity.

The trajectory was good. It had better be, or the slam would be terminal. No more Ben. If only his mother could see him now. Or maybe not.

He tucked his knees in as the roof rushed up to meet him. Every millisecond counted. If the landing was even slightly out, he'd have the joy of seeing his leg bones shooting out of his kneecaps. It didn't bear thinking about. A gap-jump was one thing, but the landing and the roulade – or roll – was another.

BANG! His feet skimmed past the top of the razor wire and thumped onto the roof. Years of practice in his mum's gym and on the streets paid off as he tucked his head in, leaned diagonally and curled into a ball. The single motion cushioned the impact as he rolled perfectly across the leaded surface to finish by standing, the end of the rope still in his hand. Yes! Yes! Yes!

He quickly turned and gave the thumbs-up to the others and a quick bow. This would out-YouTube all those other posers by a mile. Wild applause was the right response, but given

the circumstances, not a good idea.

Now he had to make the rope fast enough to support body weight. A bulky lightning rod would have to do. He attached the cable tension adjuster and began to ratchet in the slack. Soon, the rope was taut. He ran to the edge of the roof and looked into the street below. All clear.

Meanwhile, San was busy unpacking his rucksack and took out three metal loops. 'Clip-on loop-ends. This is loopy - how can such a tiny bit of metal carry me?' San wasn't exactly fat, but he was certainly bigger than the skinny girl in front of him.

Charlie smiled. 'San. Give me credit. I've been doing this stuff since I was four.'

'Yeah, but a circus-skills workshop in a warehouse with safety netting doesn't count!'

By now, Charlie had attached each of the loops to the rope and rigged up the harnesses, helping Ben and San to climb in. 'Who wants to go for a ride?'

San scuttled slowly over to the edge. His eyes went wide. The alleyway looked like a Lego model, with bins so tiny he could have picked them up and stuck them in his pocket. He felt dizzy. 'Ladies first!'

'Oh, San, it's the twenty-first century, you

know. After you! I insist!

Before San could object, Charlie pushed him out into the void. The rope bowed and San shut his eyes, trying not to scream as he slid into space. It was like aeroplanes. Despite all the science, there was no way those big lumps of steel had any business being in the sky. Neither did he. His stomach gave a lurch. If he looked down, he'd be showering the pavement with every item of food he'd eaten in the last twenty-four hours.

The next thing he knew, Ben had caught hold of him and stripped off the harness.

'See. Easy-peasy, mate.'

'It's alright for you.' San trembled all over, wishing he were back in his nice, safe bed. But at least he was still alive.

Charlie was next. She leapt off the parapet as if jumping from high-rise buildings was an after-school hobby. The loop slid smoothly towards the middle of the street and she readied her legs for landing.

She heard a sudden slicing sound above her head and looked up with horror as the outer plastic sheath of the rope began to shear, cutting a wedge into the nylon core. Both the rope and the gang's well-honed plan began to unravel.

Charlie's harness ground to a halt halfway between the building and a good twenty metres above the ground. She hung there, swaying like a Christmas decoration.

If the rope split, she'd plummet onto the road below. Pizza topping for tarmac. She gulped as two faces looked up at her from the roof, so tantalisingly near. What could she do? There was only one thing for it. She lifted a leg out of the harness and manoeuvred herself backwards until she could get her foot onto the padded bum strap. Holding onto the rope above her, she slowly stood up, swinging back and forth in the breeze.

Charlie froze as someone shouted, their voice echoing along the lonely lane. She looked down and breathed a sigh of relief. It was only the drunk, singing to himself. He stumbled along the pavement, peering into each doorway and dragging a shopping trolley behind him, filled with all his worldly belongings. She watched, fascinated.

Once the man had decided on his spot, he parked the trolley and pulled out a bed roll. Perfect. A room with a view and added air-conditioning.

But then the man did something very stupid. He staggered and found himself falling against a

plate-glass window. There was a moment of silence as the security system had a quick, logical think, and then decided it was time to make a lot of noise.

The alarm wailed out, alerting the world that all was not well. The drunk acted as if the electronic screeching was no more than a soothing lullaby. He slowly slid to the floor. But the sleeping tramp was the least of Charlie's problems. Within what seemed like a few seconds, she heard sirens approaching fast.

Ben shouted at her, but she couldn't focus as she desperately tried to hold onto the rope above her head. Her normally agile hands refused to do as they were told. Safety was so near and yet too far. Come on Charlie! She started to kick the harness away. But it was too late.

The sirens grew to a crescendo. A police car came screeching round the corner and pulled up almost directly beneath her. Two officers got out and began to scan the scene. If they looked up, she was so dead.

2. ROPE TRICKS

**Saturday 29 September, 3.10 am –
twenty-five minutes later**

Charlie could recognise that self-important swagger anywhere. PC Smythe had once told her she would follow in her father's footsteps. If the officer turned his head too far upwards, his nasty prediction would come true. It wouldn't be easy to explain why a freckled twelve-year-old with a boyish haircut was hanging from a rope in the middle of the night. The only advantage her bird's-eye view gave her was a glimpse of the officer's badly hidden bald patch and his dandruff-decorated shoulders. Fat lot of good that would do her.

The rope creaked. This was it, then. But for some strange reason, the police declined to look

up. Their eyes had spotted the cause of all the disturbance.

'Alright, Alf?' The shapeless form slumped in the doorway was not-so-gently prodded with a polished black toe-cap.

'Ummmff!' grunted Alf, none too pleased to be woken from his dream of a bed in a four-star hotel after a sumptuous meal of steak and hand-cut chips. He opened his eyes. Reality was always such a let down.

'There are good places to kip and, Alfie boy, this isn't one of them. Come on!' PC Smythe hauled the man to his feet as the other officer rang the security company. False alarm. As if by magic, the wailing stopped, to be replaced with loud complaints as Alf was pushed down the alley and told to find himself alternative accommodation. As he shuffled away, he offered up several interesting hand-signals along with a vocabulary that made Charlie smile.

'What a waste of time!' said PC Smythe.

His colleague nodded, wiping his hands on his trousers as if trying to get rid of Alf's all-too-overwhelming body odour. 'We should be catching real criminals.'

If only they'd known how close they were. They got into the car and slowly drove off.

Break leant over and looked down.

'You alright?'

'Just!'

Charlie wanted to leap down into the road, run after Alf and give him a great big kiss. But her problems weren't over yet. She was still stuck twenty metres above the alley on a rope that was fraying too quickly for comfort. Freeing the harness was not an option, as the loop was embedded deep under the plastic. She'd have to hand-walk it.

Charlie checked her grip. Good. It was time to move. She finally kicked her legs free of the harness and let her hands take the weight. Gloves would have been helpful as the rope felt far too slippery.

First, she had to deal with the harness itself. There was only one way it could be done. Charlie swallowed and tightened the grip in her stronger, left hand. With her right, she let go of the rope. That four fingers and one thumb were her only protection from sudden vertical descent didn't bear thinking about. Her free hand fumbled with the clip – which, with its easy single-handed operation, was supposedly designed for climbers. Well, the adverts were wrong, as the supposedly state-of-the-art catch