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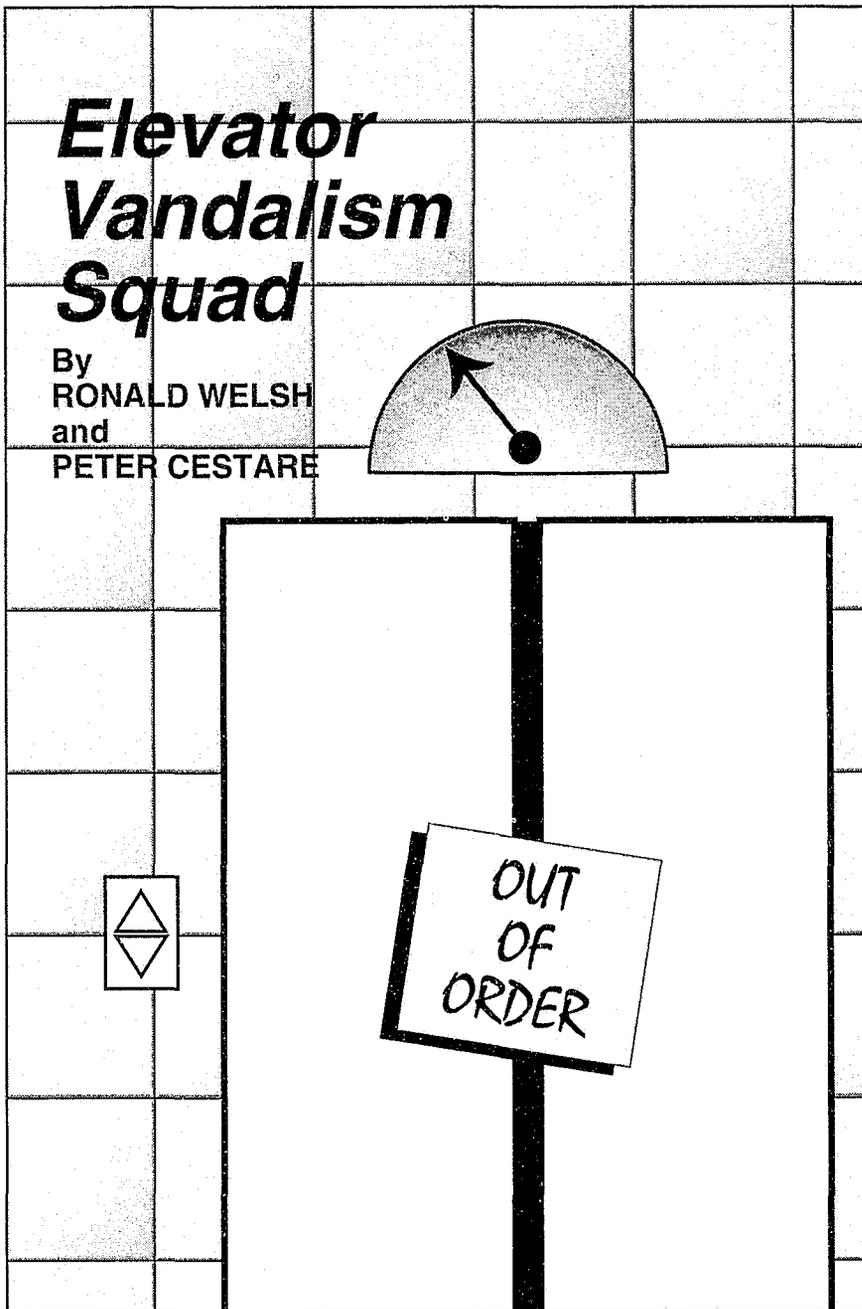
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Elevator Vandalism Squad

By
RONALD WELSH
and
PETER CESTARE



Today, most Americans take elevators for granted. These wonders of the modern age allow architects to design structures that provide ample working and living areas, while making efficient use of limited space in urban centers.

However, elevators also create special problems for law enforce-

ment agencies that provide police service to public housing highrise buildings. In New York City, this responsibility rests with the Housing Authority Police.

With an increasing number of apparent elevator vandalism cases that caused some New York City elevators to come to a halt, new problems confronted Housing Au-

thority officers. Department leaders responded by creating the Elevator Outage Reduction Program, which evolved into the Elevator Vandalism Squad (EVS).

This article discusses the EVS and how it aids in reducing vandalism and serious injuries on elevators. It also explains how the squad assists in investigations of crimes that occur on elevators, such as robberies and sexual assaults.

BACKGROUND

In 1980, the estimated cost of elevator vandalism in New York City's public housing developments approached a staggering \$10 million annually. In addition to this large financial loss, the vandalism also caused great inconvenience to scores of housing development residents.

To combat the problem, Housing Authority administrators developed the Elevator Outage Reduction Program. They began the program by assigning two investigators to review elevator records in buildings that reported an unusually high number of outages. Officials hoped to determine whether the outages were actually caused by vandalism or whether the problem was, instead, a result of stolen elevator parts.

These investigations revealed that most outages were a result of parts thefts, not merely vandalism. However, investigators also discovered a far more dangerous situation—juveniles were playing in and on the elevators, which resulted in many injuries and deaths. This discovery led department leaders to expand the program and to form the Elevator Vandalism Squad, which