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## INTRODUCTION

In our global economy where airlines, banks, and other companies are constantly merging to gain a competitive edge or monopoly, organized crime is also going global, forging strategic alliances and spanning out around the world from Russia to Columbia to the United States of America.

These new organizations comprise a sophisticated network of small groups. The criminals running the new organizations are educated, high-tech, and very resourceful. Communication between them is carried out mostly over the Internet. Young, discreet, and practical leaders have learned the trade well, avoiding the mistakes that led to the downfall of their once unified predecessors. The new generation will have a very effective international network that will be powerful, capable, and very dangerous.

## CHAPTER 1

The metal bird soared through the night, slicing the air thin with the curved blades of its jet prop. Up above, the moon shone down on the vast ocean, leaving thousands of reflections on the almost calm surface. Out ahead they could see the shoreline. The city and its highways illuminated the sky. They had received radar vectors out over the ocean and were starting their initial descent. “Let’s get the descent checklist out of the way, Dave,” Captain Kelloin said.

“Okay. Approach charts and briefing?”

“Reviewed and complete.”

“Descent power?”

“Set.”

“Altimeter setting?”

“Set to 29.98 inches.”

“Engine instruments?”

“Checked and normal.”

“Approach and landing speeds?”

“Reviewed and set.”

“Descent checklist complete.”

Marc Kelloin was just about to thank his copilot when he noticed that the left engine’s oil pressure was suddenly dropping. “Low oil pressure. Let’s get the abnormal checklist,” he said calmly.

“Roger.” Dave reached for the metal pocket by his left knee.

“Tropic Air 692, you are cleared for the ILS runway 08,” a voice announced over the loudspeaker in the cockpit. Maintain 3,000 feet until established. Be advised a thunderstorm is

moving in over the airport. We have heavy rain showers, and visibility is down to one mile.”

“Tropic Air 692, roger. We are having problems with our left engine,” Dave said.

“We’re gonna have to shut it down before it causes any damage. The other engine indicators are in agreement,” Marc said. He knew the left engine, if shut down, would cause the worst dynamic conditions. There would be more drag and decreased capabilities. The Instrument Landing System, or ILS, provided the pilots with a horizontal path as well as a vertical path, displayed on their flight instruments. All they had to do was descend if the ILS display began to move down and turn left if the display turned left so as to keep the aircraft on a straight path toward the runway centerline. They did not even have to look out the window to land this aircraft. It could land by itself with the use of the autopilot. But today they were hand flying it since the previous flight crew had reported the autopilot inoperative.

“Marc, it looks like we have a fuel leak. The gauges are only showing 600 pounds in the main tanks. I’ve checked the circuit breakers and switches. We’re only going to have one try at this approach. After that, we only have a few minutes’ flying time, just enough to ditch the plane in the ocean.”

“Roger. Declare an emergency request for a crash crew and ambulances. Advise our flight attendants of our situation. Emergency code red,” said Captain Marc Kelloin.

“Tropic Air 692 declaring an emergency low fuel condition. We are over the outer marker inbound ILS 08,” Dave reported. A blue light was blinking in the cockpit, confirming the airplane was over the final approach fix.

“Tropic Air 692. You are cleared to land.”

It was raining hard on the windshield now and the air was becoming turbulent. The airspeed indicator was fluctuating in excess of 15 knots, a sign of possible stronger wind shear.

“Flaps 15° gear down,” Marc commanded.

“All emergency checklists completed,” Dave responded.

“1000 feet, on course on glide path, runway not in sight,” Marc said. It was now completely dark. They were embedded in the clouds.

Marc’s left hand was on the control wheel, and his right was on the throttle lever. His heart rate increased and his breathing became heavier. The sweat was forcing its way out onto his forehead. He wiped it off with his right shirtsleeve.

“Delta 658 heavy, going around. Unable to see the airport, and we lost 30 knots at decision height.”

“Roger,” the air traffic controller responded.

“Tropic Air 692, wind shear of 30 knots reported, what are your intentions?” the controller asked.

A lightning strike illuminated the cockpit. They were inside a thunderstorm, and the weather radar showed a red contour cell around the location of the runway.

“We are continuing, low fuel,” Dave responded.

“Flaps 30 °. Landing checklist,” Marc commanded.

“Damn, the flaps won’t come down. We’ve lost our hydraulic pressure. We’re not going to have brakes or be able to steer the aircraft once our reserve pressure is gone,” Dave said nervously.

“Roger,” Marc responded. “Increase approach speed 8 knots and add another 10 knots for the wind gust. One hundred feet to decision height, on course on glide path, runway not in sight.”

“WIND SHEAR, WIND SHEAR, whoop, whoop. Pull up! Whoop, whoop! Pull up!” commanded the Automatic Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning System. The EGPWS computer had calculated that Tropic Air 692 would crash if the pilots did not correct their current

altitude. The jet prop was being forced down toward the ground by the wind shear. Marc quickly advanced the only good throttle lever all the way forward. At the same time he pulled the control column back so the aircraft could climb. In this configuration under normal conditions, they would be climbing at 2500 feet per minute.

They were now at two hundred feet above the ground when Dave shouted, “Runway lights in sight, lights in sight!” They were low, extremely low. Could they reach the runway? Every second felt like a minute. Dave turned on the windshield wipers. The tires skimmed the flashing sequencing lights at the extended centerline. The runway was only 200 yards away.

“The wind is variable at 25 knots, gusting 40 knots,” the controller reported. They had full power on the right engine as they reached the threshold of Runway 08. The jet prop slammed down on the runway, the main and nose gear impacting at the same time. The crew was forced down in their seats, held back by their seatbelts and shoulder harnesses. The airplane yawed sharply to the left, but Marc selected full reverse and stepped further on the right rudder to help control direction and reduce speed. The reserve hydraulic pressure was now depleted by the braking action. The runway sidelights changed from white to red, indicating they were near the end of the runway. The airplane was eating up the runway as if it were a skate on ice. Then it finally slowed to a brisk walking speed. There was only 500 feet left of the runway, and at last the aircraft stopped. Marc and Dave both sat strapped to their seats, sweating, silent, and exhausted.

The cockpit door suddenly opened, and a middle-aged man wearing a neatly pressed, light grey suit, a white shirt, and a pastel blue tie entered. He had a natural tan, a greyish tint to his black hair, and a well trimmed mustache. He was Juan Rivera, also known as “the Judge.” He was the chief pilot of Tropic Airlines. In a calm voice he said, “Congratulations, gentlemen. Marc, you have passed your simulator evaluation.”

Tropic Air Flight 692 was not a real flight. It was a made-up flight with made-up events in a flight simulator fully equipped with motion and visuals. The simulator was designed to imitate a real airplane in any weather conditions and with any mechanical malfunctions. Marc Kelloin and Dave Spencer had just finished their last day of an intensive three-day, new hire pilot interview process. All applicants had to undergo a thorough interview process, involving psychological testing as well as testing of intelligence, technical, and, of course, flying skills before being considered for a vacancy.

“Mr. Kelloin, would you meet me in my office in a half an hour? We’ll go over the final paperwork, and you’ll have a chance to meet some of the other managers,” said the Judge.

“Yes, sir, I’d be happy to,” Marc answered enthusiastically. He knew this would be the last hurdle before the job offer.

“And Mr. Spencer,” the Judge continued, “you can move over to the left seat of the simulator. It’s your turn to play captain for the next forty-five minutes.

“Thank you, sir,” Dave answered and immediately got his approach plates ready for San Juan International Airport. “I assume we’ll use ILS Runway 8 again?” Dave asked politely.

“That’s correct, and you can take a short break if you’d like. The next airman interviewee will be here in about fifteen minutes.”

Marc then proceeded to the waiting area in front of the office, sat down, and went over a few notes he had made about Tropic Airlines and his application. Marc had researched the company thoroughly. Financially, they were doing a lot better than the competition.

Maintenance reports from the FAA were excellent and accident reports were nonexistent, apart from the previous year when a captain had been killed by a runaway baggage cart and a ramp worker had accidentally walked into a spinning propeller. The aircraft were the state of the art of the industry. This was a dream come true for any pilot. Tropic Airlines did not hire new pilots

very often, indicating a low turnover.

A young attractive woman approached Marc. “Mr. Kelloin, my name is Sandra. I’m Mr. Rivera’s secretary. They are waiting for you in the office down the hall to the left.”

“Thank you very much, and nice to meet you, Sandra.” Marc walked down the hall and knocked on the door. He wore his navy-blue suit, white shirt, and red “power tie.” He was clean-shaven, and his hair was cut short and perfectly combed. He looked like the professional and mature pilot he was.

“Si, si, come in, Marc, and have a seat,” the Judge greeted him, pointing to a chair. Across the table from Marc were two other men. They nodded at him while looking through some papers. Sandra opened the door and came in with refreshments. Marc declined politely to let them know he was not there to socialize, but on business. She left the refreshments on the mahogany conference table, turned around, smiled at Marc, then walked out.

Marc had inherited the good looks of his parents. He had brown eyes and hair, stood six feet tall, and weighed 170 pounds. He had an athletic build body due to years of training in the martial art, Wing Chung, jogging, and weight training on a regular basis. Since junior high, he had been one of the fastest sprinters on the track team and had also played varsity volleyball.

“We just got your file from Human Resources, so we’ll go over your application and resume in a moment,” the Judge said.

Marc had also excelled academically and had maintained straight A’s. He had received scholarship offers from five different universities during his senior year in high school. Although Marc was dedicated to his studies and sports, he had always managed to make time to visit the local airport on weekends and watch the general aviation planes take off and land.

At age fifteen he had joined the local Civil Air Patrol Squadron. There he was introduced to aerospace education and moral leadership. Occasionally, he got to ride in a Cessna 172 single

engine airplane. In his senior year of high school, he obtained his private pilot's license and was trained as a search and rescue pilot. His instructor, Thomas Nahuru, told Marc that when he had obtained his commercial pilot's license, he could work for the charter outfit in East Africa that belonged to his brother, Peter. After Marc received his B.S. degree in Aviation, he did just that.

He flew to all the lodges in the Kenyan Savannah, the Masai Mara. He went on photo safaris and camping trips and learned about spear hunting and survival techniques from Peter, who was a descendant of the famous, tall Masai warriors. Marc was always hungry for new life experiences and adventure. After a year, Marc returned to the United States.

He had accumulated enough flying hours to get him hired by an air cargo operation in the northeastern United States. He flew anything from cancelled checks to small packages. It was all night flying, sometimes through ice storms, but he didn't mind it. He loved flying. It was his life. It was an adventure. He had acquired more life experiences at age thirty than the average person did in their entire lifetime, and his 4,000 hours of quality flight time were in demand.

"Well, Marc," the Judge said, "you have scored high on all the previous phases, and I'm sure you'll do fine in this final board interview." This comment made Marc relax somewhat, but there was something about the Judge that he didn't like. He couldn't figure out what it was, but he didn't let anyone notice it. "I apologize for not introducing you to Manny and Pedro. We've been extremely busy since we are approaching December, the beginning of the high season. So here they are. Manny Santos is our chief mechanic and has been with us since our beginning almost twenty-five years ago.

Marc stood up and reached his hand out to the chubby, balding mechanic. Upon shaking hands with him, he thought, "Damn, what a handshake."

"And this is director of operations, Pedro Echevarios."

"Pleased to meet you, Marc," Pedro said.



“Igualmente,” Marc responded in his poor Spanish.

“Ah, you’ve picked up some Spanish already?!” the Judge exclaimed.

“Well, just a little bit. I’ve been studying the Berlitz tapes since I got to Puerto Rico a month ago.”

“That’s good. All you have to do is find yourself a girlfriend that speaks Spanish. That’s the best way to learn it,” the chief mechanic said. They all laughed, and Marc knew he had broken the ice.

“Let me tell you a little about our airline,” the Judge said. “We have ten RJ’s, regional jets. They can hold fifty passengers, and they fly mostly inter-Caribbean routes, such as San Juan to St. Martin, but they go as far as Aruba during the low season. We also have ten airline jets—five Airbus A319s, and five A320s. They hold 125 and 150 passengers, respectively, and fly southbound from San Juan to Caracas, Medellín, Bogotá, Cancun, and northbound between San Juan and Miami, Orlando, New York, and Chicago.”

“We have about 120 pilots, and very few leave us because we have excellent benefits and the compensation is equal to that in the United States. Included in the benefits is a housing allowance. We’ll pay all closing costs for your mortgage and fifty percent of your monthly housing payment or rent, and one hundred percent of your car payments or lease payments, including the down payment. And last but not least, your pay is tax-free since you’ll be ‘theoretically’ based in Aruba, where we have our maintenance base. This is where we do periodic inspections, engine overhauls, et cetera,” the Judge explained.

“You’ll be living in San Juan, but your paycheck will be issued from our Aruba operation. So you get the best of both worlds. You are probably wondering what our pay scale is,” the Judge teased, smiling. Marc smiled back but did not answer, as he expected the Judge to go on.

“Your first year, you’ll be flying as first officer on the RJ and will be making an annual salary of \$95,000. Depending on your skills and the expansion of the company, you can advance to first officer on the Airbus A319 or A320 in about two years, at which time your salary will increase to \$ 130,000 a year. After about four years, you can become a shareholder and be promoted to captain on either theRJ or the "bus" and your salary will double. Now we do require that you sign a ten-year, binding employment agreement. This agreement is for our mutual benefit.”

Marc nearly fell off his chair. He was expecting a good salary, but this was too good to be true. He pretended not to be overwhelmed with excitement. His years of dedication to flying had finally paid off. He figured out in a split second that he could pay off all the loans he had taken out paying for pilot’s licenses, flight ratings, and other items in about two years time. A ten-year agreement—that would be no problem. “It would go by so fast,” Marc rationalized.

“Now that’s pretty much it, in a nutshell,” the Judge continued. “We sometimes ask our pilots to come in on their days off to do unexpected charters and ferry flights. Would you be opposed to that?”

“No, not at all.”

“Have you ever had any aircraft accidents or incidents?”

“No, sir, I haven’t. I’m a safe pilot, and strive to maintain use of the aircraft within its limitations.”

Pedro asked the next question. “Marc, have you ever broken any kind of rule?” “I guess I have on occasion broken the speed limit while driving to work, if I was running a little late,” Marc answered.

They all nodded. They had all run behind before. It was an honest answer.

Marc knew they had to ask these kinds of “honesty” questions even though they would

be investigating his background thoroughly. The answers he gave would serve to tell them whether or not he would be an honest employee.

Pedro continued. “Why did you want to be a pilot?”

I like the challenges. It’s a very dynamic environment. Everything is constantly changing ... the weather, other traffic. And it’s very rewarding every time you make a safe flight, not to mention a smooth landing. I also like the adventure—discovering new places.”

They all smiled. He had said the magic words. They liked his answer. This job was exactly what he had described: challenging, rewarding, and adventurous.

“Have you ever had any conflicts in the cockpit?” Pedro asked. He had to make sure that Marc would fit in with the pilot group. Their pilots had to be flexible and able to adjust to different personalities.

“No, I wouldn’t let a conflict happen in the cockpit in the first place. My mother once told me to treat others the way I wanted them to treat me, and it works.”

“Well, mothers are always right,” Manny said. “My mother always told me not to eat so many chuletas and rice and beans, and look at what happened to me. Now my nickname is ‘Chubby.’ Just wait, you’ll get a nickname soon also. Everybody has a nickname here. Marc, what do you know about the destinations we fly to?”

“Cancun is thriving, mostly because of tourists, I would assume. Caracas has textile and footwear industries, among others. Bogotá has emeralds, and so does Medellín, in addition to being one of Columbia’s biggest exporters of tropical flowers. And one thing they all have in common: they all speak Spanish,” Marc said, smiling.

“You’ve done your homework, I guess,” said Manny. “Some of the pilot applicants we interview don’t even know where Medellín is. I was born in Medellín and still have family there, so I usually take the cockpit jump seat when we ferry an airplane down there.”

“It must be beautiful there,” Marc commented.

“Yes, you’re right,” Manny said proudly.

“Do you have any siblings, Marc?” the Judge asked.

“No,” Marc answered. Then he thought of his best friend, Jacques, who was like a brother to him.

Jacques had joined the Army right out of high school. He had always been a bit of a rebel, and had received a dishonorable discharge for refusing to obey a superior officer who had ordered him to go on what he said would have been a suicide mission while in combat in Central America. Afterwards, Jack, as he was called, found himself on the street, hanging out with some mob guys in Miami. Last time Marc had talked to Jack on the phone, he had told him to get himself straightened out. But Jack said he was freelancing, using skills he had acquired while in the Special Forces. Marc replied that beating up people was not a way of life. After they had hung up, Jack shook his head and thought, “If only he knew.” That conversation had taken place over two years ago.

“Well, that pretty well covers all the areas we need to know about,” said the Judge. Do you have any questions, Marc?”

“Yes, you mentioned earlier that after about four years, you could become a shareholder and advance to captain. Can you elaborate on that?”

“Yes, in order to advance to the rank of captain, you must have recommendations from ten different senior captains you have flown with. Now we are very strict and have certain criteria that must be met in order for a senior captain to recommend you. It could take longer than four years. As for your becoming a shareholder, we feel that if you have been here long enough to advance to the rank of captain, you are part of the company, which, in return, will give you a percentage of the profit.

It has been our experience that employees put in extra effort if they feel appreciated and well compensated. That's an offer you can't refuse," the Judge explained. "Do you have any other questions?"

"Thank you, sir. I have no other questions," Marc answered. He knew he had impressed them. He felt confident that his enthusiasm would be considered an asset, along with his exceptional achievements.

"Thank you for coming, Marc," the Judge said as he stood up and extended his hand. "We'll notify you by mail of the outcome within two weeks."

Marc shook his hand. "Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you." Marc then shook hands with "Chubby" and Captain Echevarios, took his jacket that was hanging on his chair, and walked out the door.

As he walked by Sandra's desk, he smiled and politely said, "By the way, thank you for your assistance, Sandra. That's a pretty dress." Flattered, Sandra blushed and said, "Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Kelloin, and nice to meet you too."

Marc went down to his rental car and drove eight minutes to Laguna Gardens Condominiums, where he and Cheryl were living. Marc and Cheryl had been engaged for almost a year and were planning a wedding in June. They had met in college while taking an advanced French class. Marc's parents had emigrated from Montreal, Canada, and spoke French at home; so Marc was fluent, but was taking the class to improve his spelling and grammar. He had been immediately attracted to Cheryl. She was stunning; tall, with brown hair and exotic green eyes. And it didn't hurt that Cheryl was also interested in aviation.

After graduating from college with a B.A. in Business, she landed a job in the Marketing Department of a regional airline. However, like Marc, she also enjoyed adventure. So she had

recently taken a three-year leave of absence, transferred to flight operations, and become a flight attendant, based in San Juan.

Marc entered the apartment. Cheryl had just stepped out of the shower and had a towel wrapped around her. She walked over to Marc and hugged and kissed him. “So, how did it go? Did you get it?” Cheryl asked.

“It went pretty well. You can never tell for sure with these things. But they’ll let me know within a couple of weeks,” Marc replied while undressing. Even though it was November, it was 85° with 90% humidity.

“Oh, I’m sure you passed the test,” Cheryl said comfortingly. “But why don’t you take a shower, and I’ll give you a really challenging test.” Cheryl smiled and walked toward their air-conditioned bedroom.

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