

5 *Pub Story*

Vancouver - January, 2000

Rod

ALBERTA'S SNOWY LANDSCAPE is still visible through the cockpit windows, but the Rockies a hundred miles ahead are not. Instead a wall of cloud greets Air Arcadia 129 as an occluded front creeps through the Okanagan, over Banff, and down the foothills.

“So if we get in through all this muck, Ramrod, where will you drag my old bones for a drink?”

Rod returns from his reverie into the presence of his old friend. He has been basking in the warmth of it, the pleasure of flying with Brendan again for the first time in thirty years.

“I thought you were going to drag me. Isn't the F/O responsible for that part of the operation?”

“Jasus, old man. You forget that I'm new at this airline thing. I'm not yet intimate with every pub in every town.”

“Well, I'm ruling out the Beer Garden. On your behalf, by the way. Plenty of pilots, but no Guinness on draft.”

“Yes, I see. Although it's possible I could perhaps be persuaded

to . . .”

“. . . go without? When there are any number of places . . . hey, what about that place Cameron took you? On your line indoc.”

“Oh yes. Down in Yaletown. But it was summer. We sat outside.”

“Not gonna do that tonight.”

“No.”

It is almost time to pay attention. The Top Of Descent arrow is approaching.

“Perhaps you’d like to check my handiwork, Ramrod. I don’t want a mistake of mine distracting you in this weather.”

In answer Rod calls up the FLT PLN page on his MCDU ^[see Glossary]. Booth 5 STAR. ILS 08L. He flips over to FLT PLN page A. All the STAR constraints are there: VITEV at or below FL 210; LANNE at or below 16000, BASRA at 230 Kts or less. Brendan has added constraints at each waypoint to reflect the Minimum Enroute Altitude for that segment.

“Nice. Thank you, Brendan.”

“My pleasure, old man. Still, I’m curious to see how you’re going to separate the Cumulo-Nimbus from the Cumulo-Granite on the radar.”

Rod chuckles and turns on the radar, adjusting it to catch the mountain tops. He flips through the RAD NAV page and the FUEL PRED page and the PERF CRUISE page. Just for fun, he hits the DES FORECAST prompt. Brendan has wind entered at four different levels, including four thousand feet where they are likely to be on downwind.

“Wow, look at these winds. How they back around. Not east until we get down to four.”

“Yes. I played with the cabin descent rate. I hope you don’t mind.”

Rod glances over. 280 feet per minute.

“I thought, with the restrictions and all, why not even it out?”

Rod looks more closely at the predicted crossing altitudes. A couple are very close to the restrictions.

“Very cool.”

Rod picks up the ATIS: 200 Broken, 300 Overcast, visibility 3/8 mile in moderate rain and snow, temperature 2, dew point 1, wind 110/18G24, altimeter 28.91, ILS 08L, CAT II operations in progress. RMKS CLG RGD. He glances back at the four thousand foot wind: 160/45. He interpolates and makes up a number to keep in his head for base leg: 140/40. Base leg will be at three, or maybe descending to two, depending on traffic. They will be on vectors, but it's nice to have an idea ahead of time.

He presses the EGAD Status button. All systems are go.

“Nice job, Brendan. You'll have to be careful, though – people might think you're a geek.”

Brendan looks over to see Rod grinning at him.

“Ah, Jasus, Ramrod. You know I'd show off for no one but yourself.”

Laughing, Rod launches into his approach briefing.

“. . . we may be picking our way around some buildups out over the water, by the look of it. And with the viz at 3/8 we'll set up and brief for a CAT II ^[see Glossary], just in case. But if we have the appropriate visuals before hundred above I'll disconnect and do a manual landing, just so you can blame me. Config 3. Autobrake LO. Normal reverse. And let's remember the altimeter is two eight nine one. Let's enjoy this then we can go drink beer.”

“I'll call a hundred above and Decision. Indeed: 28.91. And amen.”

“Here comes Top Of Descent.”

Rod sweeps his right fist down, thumb pointed at the throttles.

“Descent, please. And Pre-Descent Check.”

§

As expected, they are held at eight thousand until BASRA, just east of English Bay. Then they have to get down in a hurry. There is no one ahead of them and Approach is anxious to get them turned in.

“Air Arcadia 129, cleared to three thousand, slow to 180 when reaching.”

Rod pulls the speedbrake handle back and calls for Flap 1. In his head is the VFR view: the mound of the Simon Fraser campus sliding beneath them; Belcarra and all of Indian Arm off their right wing; downtown and English Bay ahead. The engine and airframe anti-ice are on. Out of six thousand the turbulence begins in earnest. It is not eyeball bounce intensity, but close. Rod turns his display lighting up a notch. He visualizes the mountain tops north of the city rising above them: Mt. Seymour, Grouse Mountain. The radar is contouring these and others, to the right of track. There are a few similarly-contouring blobs on the track.

“You were right, Brendan. Tell him we will deviate three miles south of track at VARSY. Oh, and if he wants to turn us in from three south of track, that’s OK. Big south wind here. Flap 2.”

They are skirting the blob at VARSY, levelling at three. Suddenly there is a burst of heavy, noisy precip.

“What the heck is it? Not hail, I don’t think.”

Brendan inspects his windshield wiper bolt.

“It’s Jasus slush, Ramrod. Flyin’ fockin’ slush.”

“Air Arcadia 129, descend two thousand, slow to 160, turn left heading 150.”

“Gear down, Landing Check.”

“Air Arcadia 129, turn left heading 110 to intercept, cleared ILS

CAT II 08L, hold 160 to DULKI.”

“We’re gonna be inside DULKI, but that’s OK. LOC alive. LOC. Flap 3.”

“Flaps 3, Vapp 139.”

“Glideslope.”

“Air Arcadia 129, tower at DAWG one one niner dezimal fife fife.”

“Roger. Air Arcadia 129, tower at DAWG. See ya.”

Rod waves his thumb over the throttles.

“By the DAWG. Love that. Dawg.”

“Air Arcadia 129 by DAWG.”

“Air Arcadia 129, Vancouver Tower, cleared to land runway 08L, altimeter two eight eight niner, wind one one zero at two zero gusting two eight, RVR 2600, lights strength fife.”

“Roger Air Arcadia 129, cleared to land runway 08L, two eight eight nine, OK, Dawg was 1320, altimeter two eight eight nine, Missed Approach 2000 set.”

It is still rough. But the ceiling is indeed ragged; whitecaps are intermittently visible. One of the log booms flashes by underneath. Then the vista begins to open out. With their almost ten degrees of drift, it would be quite disorienting to the unprepared.

Rod already has his head turned ten degrees left. He glances up. A pretty picture.

“Autopilot Off.”

The cricket chirps. *Bleet bleet bleet.*”

“Roger. Hundred Above.”

“Roger.”

“Decision.”

“Visual. Landing.”

Brendan gets his eyes inside to cover Rod. The LOC and Glideslope are still nailed. He looks up. In one motion that seems unrelated to the turbulence, Rod flares, pushes the nose smoothly left to line up, and lowers the right wing a few degrees. The power comes off. The attitude is as if frozen. The touchdown is announced by a slight settling as the spoilers come up. Brendan glances down at the wheels page. It is true. Ten little green arrows point upwards from ten little lines: the five spoilers on each wing.

Rod selects reverse. Brendan moves his eyes to the upper screen.

“Reverse Green.”

Rod selects a moderate reverse thrust, more by sound than numbers. The decel light blinks a few times and stays on, indicating that 80 percent of the LO BRK deceleration target has been reached.

“70.”

Rod is already moving the reverse slowly to idle. The Autobrake eases in, maintaining the target 5.6 ft/sec/sec deceleration rate.

“Air Arcadia 129, first high-speed if able, contact Ground one two seven dezimal one fife.”

“Well, Ramrod, ‘twill be my own self buyin’ tonight. That was a work to behold.”

§

“You know, we might try this place, Brendan.”

They are on their way to Yaletown, walking through the wet and slush. A couple of blocks south of Granville, a Guinness sign hangs in a window.

“Must be new. Never seen this place before. The Swamp Pub. What do you think?”

“Guinness, sure enough.”

“We’ll stop for a beer. See if they have food.”

“Command decision, Ramrod. After you, old man.”

§

The L-shaped bar is someone’s very fine handiwork. A medium-dark wood with a beautiful grain pattern glows under the coasters. A set of draught pulls sprouts from the bar to their right. Pints of Guinness and Okanagan Pale sit half-empty in front of them.

Rod takes a sip of his Okanagan and catches the bar girl’s eye. He moves two fingers in a circle.

“Jasus, Ramrod. Get me far enough into the pints and I won’t be needin’ me supper.”

“No fear, Brillo. We’ll eat after this.”

He gestures to their right. At end of the other wing of the bar three steps lead up into a larger room where food is being served.

“We can even take these up, if you like.”

“Sure and maybe. But let’s be done with the subject, such as is is. You were sayin’?”

Rod sighs.

“Whatever I say about Enrico will be too much. But with you, Brendan . . .”

Brendan waits him out.

“Well, I have to admit I was surprised. Not because I didn’t think he could do it. He can do very well if he puts his mind to it. But I knew they were gunning for him, is all.”

“Yes.”

“And they send him out with Ice Pick . . .”

“Yes. Do you know the man?”

“Yeah. He was on our course. Good guy and all, but . . .”

“Tough?”

“You mean as a checker?”

Brendan nods.

“Yeah. I would think so. Serious type.”

“Takes himself seriously, perhaps?”

Rod snorts.

“Yeah. Not a lot of laughs.”

The music has been subliminal until now. Somehow the song intrudes. It is Stan Rogers singing *Make and Break Harbour*. The beauty of the old ways, and their passing, catches both men at the throat. The image of the Cape Islander, tacking for home on a fair breeze but with an empty hold. And the singer.

“Borne away with the cod, he was.”

“What, Brendan?”

“Stan. By our own airline.”

“Yeah.”

The song ends. *Old nets hung to dry*.

Brendan drains his pint and pushes it to the back of the bar. He pulls the new one closer on its coaster, an outsized cargo on a small barge.

“My turn to say too much, now.”

He inspects the head on his new Guinness.

“Pretty, is it not?”

Brendan puts his pint back on the coaster. A trace of foam remains on his upper lip.

“I heard from an old friend, Ramrod. Derek. Military. After your

time. Mechanic. Good one, too.”

“He called you?”

“Yes. The day before we left on this cycle.”

An Acadian fiddle tune begins. It seems to re-energize Brendan.

“Thing is, I have never heard him so upset. He poured his heart out to me.”

Brendan takes a gulp from his Guinness.

“You see, Derek joined our airline before I did. Based in Calgary. Has family there. Always been an Albertan. So Cold Lake was sort-of home, as well. Anyway . . .”

Brendan tells the story. It is a sad one. Rod shakes his head in disbelief.

“So the ELAC he installed was unserviceable?”

“Just so.”

Rod looks stricken.

“You’re right of course, Brendan. It’s buried. Ninety-nine percent. Enrico passed. He’s not going to spill anything. And as for Ice Pick . . .”

“He could lose his job. As could anyone who was in it with him.”

“Yeah. Still, Derek has nothing to worry about.”

“Agreed. But that was no comfort to the poor man. I told him he would keep his job and his suffering was a message from Our Lord. When he had pondered on it sufficiently he would be absolved.”

Their pints sit empty in front of them. Rod twirls his glass.

“Brendan – don’t you feel it? That something has gone?”

“Our integrity. As a group.”

Brendan pushes his coaster and its empty cargo to the back of the

bar.

“Jasus. As an airline, when it comes to that.”

Rod waits.

“Well, then. When one of us tears the fabric, it doesn’t stop there. T’would take a great leader to put up new canvas or sew up the wound.”

“So Brendan. Is Boy Wonder up to it? Is he that leader?”

“Smart he is, that’s sure enough. And well intentioned, I believe.”

Brendan pushes back his stool.

“But I fear not, Ramrod. Shall we go eat?”