

# **ATLANTIC PYRAMID**

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## Chapter One

My name is Heath Sharp. On June thirteenth, I discovered a world within our own and it terrified me.

The horizon glowed white between the ocean and sky. No clouds hovered and there were no strong winds. Gavin Cole was one of my favorite students and not because he was a whiz kid. I'd trained him every Tuesday for the past few months and he'd finally broken out of his shell to fly a few times on his own. I didn't mind his apprehension; patience was just part of being a mentor.

"All right, take the yoke."

"Uh, what's the yoke again?" Gavin asked. He was also a smartass.

I gave him a sideways glance and he shot me a wide grin in return, wrapping his hands around the controls. "Dude, kidding. Just kidding."

"Now, remember, it's not like driving a car," I said, letting go of my wheel. "You don't steer with the yoke. You use the pedals."

"Got it, dude. Yoke pitches and banks; pedals steer the plane."

One of the problems people have when learning to fly is forgetting their driving habits. It's a challenge to help them through the transition from operating a car to flying an aircraft, but I love it.

"Dude, we're at ninety-five knots. Is that too fast?"

I read the LCD screen. The speedometer wavered between ninety-four and ninety-five knots. "No, we're good. Just keep her steady. As for now, the sky is ours."

"I like that."

I have to admit, I did too. Flying gave my students the feeling of being free from the world, where they could leave all their bad memories in the clouds. That was the sensation I'd gotten as a young boy the first time I'd taken to the sky in my grandmother's airplane. I remember the rumble of the runway sliding beneath us before it suddenly became smaller as the plane lifted off the ground. The sky had then opened into a never-ending blue sheet above our heads.

*"If you reach high enough, you can touch the stars,"* Grandmother would say.

She'd taught me how to fly. In gratitude, I'd promised if I ever owned a plane, I'd name it after her—and I had. I'd named my Cessna Skyhawk *Gypsy Girl*.

"Man, I like these screens you got in here," Gavin said, tapping the LCD displays. "Can we get HBO on 'em?"

"You think it's funny acting dumb?"

"Yep, it passes the time." When I grinned, he added, "What's this called again?"

I looked over at him. His thin lips were as straight as a paper's edge. "Nah, really, I'm not acting dumb this time. Honest."

With a deep sigh, I turned back to the horizon. "It's a G1000. What we're sitting in is called a glass cockpit."

"I bet it's easy to teach people how to fly in one of these, huh?"

"You'd think," I grumbled.

"The sight of all these gadgets in an old instrument panel would downright terrify me. I always liked change. Change is a good thing—change in the weather, clothes styles, *lovers*. Anyway, I *do* know what kind of cockpit we're in. I'm not a complete dumbass. I just suck at

remembering numbers. Just about anything with numbers makes me as empty-headed as a senile person in a guessing game.”

“You did well on the written test. Few people get the part about the altimeter on the first try.”

“I hated that section,” he bemoaned. “If the small hand is just over the one, how many feet are you? If you’re cruising at nine thousand feet MSL, how many feet is that in AGL?”

“And the answer is?”

He bit his bottom lip.

“Damn it, if you’ve forgotten the answers already, I’m gonna throw your ass out of this plane.”

He went from biting his lip to drumming on his front teeth. “Er . . . eighty-two hundred feet?”

“And what does MSL stand for?”

“Mean Sea Level.”

“And?”

“And if the small hand is over the one, you’re at a thousand feet.”

“Good job.”

“Whew, I’m glad I didn’t complain about *every* test question or this would be one hell of a scary flight. Dude, maybe that’s how you instructors should do the tests. Know what I’m sayin’? Bet you’d get a lot more people studying their asses off the night before if they knew they’d get thrown out of a soaring airplane for missing a question.”

“Bet you’re right.”

He pressed on the right pedal to bank the plane in the other direction. “I have a cousin livin’ in Weed, California. Maybe I’ll visit him. While I’m there, I’ll check out that reservation your dad lives on.”

“Weed is a bit far from Whitethorn,”

“What tribe are you again? Wichita?”

“Wailaki. My father is full-blooded but my mother is white.”

“That would explain those pretty green eyes of yours.” He laughed. “Don’t worry, dude, I’m not hittin’ on ya.”

I shook my head. “You’re stupid.”

“That’s pretty cool, though. Not many people can say they have Wailaki blood in ’em. Most people say they’re Cherokee. It’s funny, ’cause they claim their great-great-great-grandmother was a Cherokee princess. Not only would there have to have been a lot of Cherokee princesses back then, but there would also have to be such a thing as a Cherokee princess. What’s the reason for people thinking that, anyway?”

“The Trail of Tears,” I said, surprised that Gavin even knew the Cherokee princess claims were bullshit. I’d heard people—mostly from white women—say the same thing about their great-great-great-grandmother when I mentioned my Native American heritage. Whenever some bright blonde number told me that, I felt compelled to help piece together her family tree and teach her something about believing everything she’d been told.

“Everything’s lookin’ good,” Gavin said, turning on the XM radio. “Looks like blue skies from here on out.”

As he turned up the volume, Don McLean’s song *American Pie* came on.

“Eerie,” I murmured.

“What, the song?”

“Yeah. Don’t you know why McLean wrote it?”

He was quiet for a moment. “Oh, yeah. ’Cause of that band that died in a plane crash. Think it’s a bad omen? Should we turn around?”

“It’s just a coincidence. Don’t worry about it.” I leaned back in the leather seat and checked the instruments. “Fuel gauge looks good, knot speed same, and the plane is level with the horizon. You’re doing great.”

I stared off into the big blue sky. Not a puff of white anywhere, just a clear view of light blue on the dark.

\* \* \*

“Mayday! Mayday!” I yelled into the radio. “This is Cessna 2B-Golf, requesting assistance! We’ve run into a squall!”

The plane shook violently in the winds. The windshield wipers couldn’t push away the sheets of rain fast enough. I looked over at the map on the display screen. “Our coordinates are—”

I stopped myself when I noticed our location. The map had to be wrong. “Wait, how did we fly twenty miles past Nassau?”

Both screens turned to snow as a constant beeping came from the stall warning indicator.

“Shit!” I yelled as static came over the radio. “Steve, are you there? Mayday!” I waited for a response but got none. “We’ve lost communications!”

“We’re stalling,” Gavin shouted, pointing to a red light. “Oh, my God, we’re gonna crash!”

“Shut up!” I barked. “I’ll get us out of this.”

I gripped the control stick and pulled back, lifting the nose while using full throttle to build up speed.

“What’s wrong with the screens?” he asked. “Oh God, what’s happening with the instruments?”

I did my best to steady the jerking plane. The entire backup system went haywire. The compass, speedometer, airspeed indicator, and altimeter spun wildly. All around us, the sky had turned nearly pitch black, while the rain pounded so hard it was as if we were flying through a waterfall.

I couldn’t understand it. One second, we were flying through crisp open skies with Miami at our backs, the next, I was fighting to get out of a storm that had literally dropped down on us. I couldn’t see anything. I didn’t know how high we were or if the plane was even level. All the instruments either beeped or flashed. Both dials on the altimeter went in different directions and the compass spun so fast I couldn’t make out the letters.

“Get us outta here, dude!” Gavin shouted, clutching anything he could as another gust pounded the plane.

I white-knuckled the wheel and stomped on the left pedal, trying to turn the plane and head back the way we’d come. My body pressed against the door as the aircraft made a sharp change in direction. It was dangerous going against the wind, like a surfer going against a big wave. The storm was like a playground bully and the plane a geeky kid taking one pulverizing blow after another. I couldn’t tell which direction the wind came from. It seemed to come from everywhere at once, giving me no sense of whether I had done the right thing or not.

I gritted my teeth as the wheel violently shook in my sweat-drenched hands. When the plane turned, a rush of calm washed over me. If I could overcome the wind and circle around,

there was a chance we might pull out of the storm.

Then the engine died. Darkness shadowed the inside of the cockpit as both screens went blank. The control panel lights shut off. The buzzing of the propellers went silent when the blades stopped.

“Jesus!” Gavin cried. “What happened?”

“We just lost power.”

I tried the magnetos to jolt power into the engine, while working to crank the throttle, but the propellers wouldn’t turn. The plane was dead. My stomach slid into my throat as the nose cone dipped.

“We’re losing altitude,” I said, trying anything to regain power.

“Fuck! We’re gonna crash!”

I wanted to reassure him that I was going to get us safely out of this, but I said nothing. He was right. We were crashing.

A gust of wind suddenly flew under the right wing, spinning us as we plummeted. Even when I shut my eyes, I couldn’t escape the feeling that I was riding the Sizzler at a carnival. Pressure pushed against both sides of my head. Gavin screamed so loud I didn’t know if he heard me yell, “Hang on!”

I gripped the wheel so tight my fingernails dug into the handles. I could see nothing outside as we tumbled through blackness. Soon everything went dark.

When I regained consciousness, everything around me was quiet. I was surrounded by dim, blurry objects. The pounding in my skull answered the question of whether I was alive or dead. With a groan, I slowly raised my head. The safety harness still held me in my seat. My dark bangs draped my eyes and I brushed them back with a shaky hand. When I did, my palm came away soaked in sweat.

That wasn’t the only part of me that was wet. My feet were submerged in water. My eyes suffered from a hazy cloud shrouding me but my nose told me it was seawater. My first presumption was that the plane had somehow miraculously stayed afloat. I took off my sunglasses and looked at the bent frames until my vision began to clear.

“Gavin,” I said weakly, “we have to get out of here before the plane sinks.”

Gavin’s head lay on the control wheel, facing me. His safety harness had broken and his face had slammed into the aluminum wheel. I tugged on his shirt sleeve. “Gavin, wake up, man. We have to go.”

He didn’t stir. I slipped his sunglasses off and saw he was dead. His brown eyes were wide and unblinking. Thick streams of blood slid down his face and dripped from his chin. To be on the safe side, I checked for a pulse but found none. There was even a strong stench of urine. I didn’t judge him for it. I had only been seconds away from doing the same.

I looked at the control panel. Both displays were blank and one was cracked. I tried the radio and called for assistance, but there was nothing. *Gypsy Girl* was as dead as the woman she was named after.

I pulled out my cell phone but it had no power. I searched through Gavin’s pocket and found his, but it was dead as well.

Outside was a gray fog. The rain had stopped, but there was a strange lingering mist in the wake of the storm.

I needed to deploy the life raft before the plane sank. Unbuckling my safety harness, I eased into the back area of the plane, happy it didn’t sink any deeper. Maybe we’d landed on a coral reef. If that was the case, perhaps the plane would stay put long enough for me to reach shore. I

could then send someone to load the plane onto a ship and tow it back to Miami.

I was ashamed to find myself thinking more about my aircraft than about Gavin. I wasn't an insensitive or materialistic person, but a dead plane seemed more real to me than a dead man. In a way, thinking about the plane's future allowed me to focus on my own. I didn't have time to mourn Gavin. It would make me weak and weakness might do me in.

I found the life raft floating like an orange block in the back. In a wall compartment were two flare guns in a tin box. Since it was so dark and would only get darker, I grabbed a flashlight before strapping on a life vest and making my way back to the front.

Gavin remained motionless against the control wheel, his eyes staring blankly forward. I glanced at him for a moment as I squeezed between the seats and sat down. Then I checked the side window. The water reached only to the lower portion of the door.

I saw a dark, shadowy shape through the glass. It was a solid object close to the plane but I couldn't make it out. I grabbed the door handle. Although I wasn't sure why, I looked back at Gavin and said, "I'll be back in a sec."

I wasn't worried about water rushing into the plane and taking it under, but the thought did cross my mind. The mysterious surface the plane sat on couldn't be more than five feet underwater. Even so, I held my breath as I pushed the door open. It proved to be a bit of a challenge, since the hinges were broken and the water was like syrup. But I used all my strength to push it just enough to squeeze through. Then I threw caution to the wind and leapt out, sinking only waist-deep in water.

The ground was bumpy and hard. What I stood on wasn't coral, it was muddy rock. I was surprised it hadn't torn the plane apart upon impact.

I was glad the ocean temperature near Miami was comfortable. However, the fact that I wasn't able to distinguish anything that might be lurking beneath the surface made me edgy.

I set aside my apprehension and made my way to the nose of the plane to assess the damage. My chest felt tight every time I breathed, as if my lungs had collapsed. I was a bit light-headed from the thick smell of gas. I noticed a sheen of it coating the surface. I thought it came from my plane, until I saw what I'd seen through the windshield of the cockpit—the wing of another aircraft. Its end was underwater but I could still see a white star inside a blue circle with red-and-white stripes painted on the side of its body. A World War II insignia.

"What the hell?" I muttered.

To keep my flare gun and flashlight dry, I placed everything back on the seat of my plane, then climbed the wing of the World War II aircraft. The fog wet my face like sea spray.

Judging by the wing's length, I estimated the plane's wingspan to be at least a hundred and eighteen feet. The wing was tilted enough to give my New Balance sneakers a challenge with traction. It wasn't long before I came across the propellers and a canopy. I stared at it, trying to catch my breath. The air didn't help but the fog started to thin, like a theater crowd at the end of a show.

I'm a history buff at heart. If I'd gone to college, I would've taken history as my major. One of favorite subjects I took an interest in was planes and ships. I suppose it came from my love for flying. So when I saw the WWII aircraft, I knew exactly what I was looking at.

A much larger Navy symbol was visible on the side of the plane under its canopy. It was a PBM Martin Mariners patrol aircraft. In War World II, battles had raged in the Pacific months after the war had ended in Europe. Planes such as this one had been used by the Navy for long overseas flights. They were nicknamed flying gas tanks because they carried so much fuel. This plane's tank must have cracked and the gas had spread like glossy butter on the water.

Amazing. I was standing on a piece of history.

As I turned, I found that *Gypsy Girl* and the PBM Martin weren't alone. In the field of water around me, numerous planes and ships were scattered about, some clustered together, others by themselves. It was hard to tell in the fog, but I could have sworn they came from several different eras.



## Chapter Two

From where I stood, I saw a 1947 C-54 airplane, three yachts, two sailboats, other Cessnas, and one Piper Cherokee. In the far distance, blurry silhouettes of more planes and ships faded into the fog, some larger than the ones near me.

What the hell had I crashed into? I'd traveled all over the world and experienced many strange things, but nothing like this. When I was a kid, my mother and grandmother had taken me to the Mystery Spot near Santa Cruz, where people could walk up walls and pool balls would roll upward on planks. It had been my first taste of the bizarre. In my later travels, I'd seen even more exotic and extraordinary things, but nothing compared to what I witnessed now.

It appeared that I'd crashed at the edge of a mysterious landfill. Behind me, there was nothing but mist and dark water. I turned back to the abandoned ships, both air and watercraft, cupped my hands around my mouth, and yelled, "Hello! Is anybody out there?"

Silence.

After a few minutes, I decided to explore the PBM. The plane was tilted sideways, its wing acting like a kickstand. I walked up to the canopy and looked in. It was dark inside but objects were visible beyond the thick glass. I half expected to find the skeletal remains of the pilot.

No dust coated the equipment. Other than the dented and scratched exterior, the entire plane was in pristine condition. No rust had eaten away at its black metal or the propellers. The stars and stripes on the side were crisp and clear, as if they'd been painted on yesterday. I wanted to go inside but the door was too far down the tail section and nothing was available for me to climb on.

Judging by the wide-open door, it appeared as if the crew had survived and abandoned the plane. Even so, the PBM had gone down several decades ago, so I didn't expect to find them. There were more recent vessels and aircraft with possible survivors I could look for. I needed to find someone. I needed explanations.

The trip off the plane proved more challenging than the trip up it and my sneakers slipped out from under me. I landed on my back and slid along the wing like a water slide, all the way into the ocean. I was underwater for less than a second before my life vest brought me back to the surface. There, I stood on the muddy surface and slid my hands back to pull the hair out of my face. My heart knocked against my breastbone as I waded back to my plane to retrieve the flares, flashlight, and life raft.

When I reached the open door, I looked behind me at the gray horizon. No wrecks sat out there. The water was flat and dark, and as I strained to see through the fog, several chunks of what appeared to be ice drifted by.

Ice in tropical water?

As the ocean swirled around me, the floes liquefied. I waded a few steps to my right, my arms outstretched, until the muddy bottom suddenly dropped out from under me. My life vest kept me afloat but it didn't keep me warm. The subfreezing temperature raced through my body and ate into my bones.

How could I be in water so cold that ice floated around me? My limbs were numb and my heart rate slowed. I frantically thrashed my arms to keep afloat. Although it was difficult to do the backstroke with my vest on, I kept kicking until a wash of warm water swept over me. My

feet found the ground and I stepped back onto the ledge, shivering.

The irony of it was overwhelming. If I'd crashed just three feet farther away, my plane would've sunk in that frigid water. It was an amazing stroke of luck to escape death twice in the same plane crash.

As I counted my blessings, something bumped against my side—a floating wine bottle with a piece of paper rolled up inside. I popped the cork and managed to pry it out. It was handwritten but in Spanish. I shoved the note back inside, stuffed the cork in the opening, and hurled it back into the ocean.

As feeling returned to my body, I waded over to my plane and pulled the cord to inflate the life raft. Tossing the flare guns, flashlight, and oars into it, I took a last look at Galvin's lifeless body.

“Sorry, but if I find help, I'll come back for you.”

It didn't seem strange to make a promise to a dead man. After all, I'd yelled at the living, screaming Gavin not long ago.

I clambered into the raft and started my quest to look for survivors. The journey was more difficult than I anticipated. Everything was surreal. I didn't know what was out here but I needed to keep moving. I had to find someone—anyone—who might give me answers.

I hadn't been rowing more than ten minutes before a sharp, jagged piece of metal snagged my raft and tore a hole in it. I didn't have any patching supplies, so I jumped ship. Drowning was the least of my worries. I'd been captain of the swim team in high school and now wore a life vest.

I should've known the water would be full of hidden debris on the bottom or floating around, and I cursed myself for not thinking of it before ruining the raft. To prevent my legs from getting sliced, I tried leaping from one wreck to the next, until I came upon something my mind couldn't wrap itself around.

I climbed onto the deck of a sailboat, heading toward another plane, when a massive blob stopped me in my tracks. It was a living mass with veins and tentacles, and it stretched over the side of the boat to curl around the mast. Its suction cups—each the size of my palm—had fish bones and broken bits of crab shell stuck to them.

If it was an octopus, it was the biggest goddamn one I'd ever seen. I'd heard about giant octopuses in the North Pacific, but this looked as if it could swallow a car whole. Its glossy black eyes stared at me as it heaved short breaths. I retreated slowly, not knowing if it would envelope me in its huge tentacles. But it didn't. It just breathed heavily, as if gasping for air.

After carefully wading through the water, I stopped to rest on the wing of a Piper Aztec. I was surprised to find a number of other octopuses lounging on ship decks and planes like sea lions. But it was another massive silhouette that caught my attention. Curious, I carefully jumped to another Cessna before leaping onto a speedboat and then stepping into the water. As I drew closer, my mind screamed, *This can't be real! I can't be seeing this.*

It was the underbelly of a massive wooden ship tilted at a seventy-degree angle. The hull was infested with barnacles, and as I looked closer, the white shell of one opened. Something spiraled out, nearly licking my nose. The barnacles were alive, despite being out of water. How the hell did they survive that way?

I waded along the edge of the huge vessel until I could climb to the top of a 1979 Beech Musketeer. There, I stood in silent awe of a thousand-ton Manila galleon warship. It was the oldest and largest vessel I'd come across so far. I'd seen a couple of Grumman T9F-2 Panthers from World War II, at least twenty Chris Crafts, three schooners, several Piper planes spanning

three decades, a handful of yachts, and a 1942 TBF Avenger, but the galleon went back two centuries, although it appeared to be in pristine condition.

None of the vessels had been eaten up by the elements. I came across two Lancer wooden boats and a Catalina yacht, all as perfect as the day they'd been made in the fifties. How was it that every one of them seemed unaffected by the humidity and salt water?

Like the other vessels, the galleon looked ready to go. Sails hung in the still air on their masts, along with an American flag on the mizzen topsail. Why the galleon hadn't capsized confused me, until I noticed what it rested on. Crushed beneath the side of the great vessel was another long wooden ship with carvings on its side. The damage done when the galleon had come to rest against it prevented me from distinguishing its artwork.

I caught sight of something else—a long plank extending from the unfortunate vessel to a half sunken sailboat. I wanted to stay out of the water, which meant leapfrogging from one craft to the next. I jumped onto another aircraft, then onto the back of the sailboat, where I studied the plank, which turned out not to be a plank at all, but a wooden sculpture of an ancient dragon.

"A Viking ship?" I muttered, my eyes following the carving to the crushed ship it was attached to.

The head of the dragon nearly reached the sailboat's bow. I took a chance and leapt onto it. The thick wooden construction held my weight but not without some rebellious creaks. I scrambled over the dragon's neck, where a long ladder hung down. I wondered if the crew had placed it there to escape the ship.

I climbed the ladder, but halfway up, the air seemed to squeeze my lungs, making it hard to breathe. I stopped to rest and took advantage of the sights. The fog remained thick but the planes and boats were still visible. It seemed like a dream, and in a way, I was excited about this strange world around me. I loved experiencing new things. When I'd left home to explore the world, I'd journeyed far off the beaten path to discover what most tourists avoided. But hanging out with headhunters in a jungle couldn't top the mystery I now faced.

Near the end of my climb, I found myself face-to-face with a porthole door. When I raised the heavy wooden flap, the mouth of a cannon stared back at me. By the time I reached the deck, my lungs burned like a fifty-year-old smoker. The ship was in perfect condition, with smooth, untarnished floorboards and ropes hanging from shrouds that were neither broken nor frayed.

I climbed one of the stern side staircases to reach the helm. The ship's wheel was polished and turned with ease. I could hear the rudder sliding back and forth behind me.

I'd never been on an actual galleon before. The closest I'd come to that was the Galleon Swinging Ship pirate ride at American Adventures. Like a kid high on imagination, I played with the wheel for a while before going below. There, I peered into the dark captain's cabin. I clicked on my flashlight but it wouldn't work.

"Damn it!" I shook it as if that would help. I'd just changed the batteries.

After my eyes adjusted to the dark, I could make out a small table. The gray light filtering in through the doorway and large windows gave enough illumination to find some matches. An oil lantern hung from a column beside the table. I struck the match and dipped it inside the glass. To my relief, the wick sprang to life.

I expected spider webs and a blanket of dust, but the corners and surfaces were clean. The floor, though, was littered with fallen items. It appeared as if the ship had been caught in a massive storm, throwing everything that wasn't nailed down to the floor.

"Hello?" I called, looking around. The cabin smelled of body odor mixed with a hint of smoke, as if every candle in the room had been blown out only minutes before. "Is anyone here?"

Anyone?”

I touched one of the flare guns tucked under my belt. I didn't like the idea of using it as a weapon. Shooting someone with a flare would be like shooting them with a ball of fire. I'd use the aluminum flashlight over the flare gun if it came to that.

I scanned the room but there was no reply to my call. I kept my guard up, just in case.

An oak table sat in the center of the room with a scroll on it. I set the lantern down next to a map pinned on each corner by a Mora knife. It was a map of the Atlantic Ocean, although many Caribbean islands were missing. There were over seven thousand islands in the area but the map showed no more than two hundred. Even the Gulf of Mexico—the ninth largest body of water in the world—was missing, and Cuba was listed as *Isla Juana*. The date in the right-hand corner read 1804.

If the ship and everything on it was really over two hundred years old, why did it all look relatively new?

There weren't many other things in the room. Anything worth taking, the crew had probably carried off with them. Even the mattress on the small bed was gone. I hoped to find the captain's log to give me clues as to what had happened but I couldn't find any trace of it.

I left the cabin and went down to the gun deck, where cannon balls were scattered about. The smell of gunpowder permeated the air. I knelt, placed the lantern and flashlight on the floor, and picked up one of the cannon balls. It was no larger than a coconut but weighed enough that I couldn't hold it for long. When I dropped it, it landed with a thud and rolled across the floor.

As I walked through the ship, I passed several empty barrels. I searched for other artifacts until I found a second staircase.

“Hello? Anyone down there?”

I warily descended to the next level. As I crept down the steps, another strong whiff of body odor struck me. When I stepped off the staircase, I found the source of the smell—a man lying in a hammock.

“Oh shit!” I exclaimed, startled.

The man wasn't disturbed by my expletive.

“Are you all right?” I asked.

He said nothing. He appeared to be asleep, although I thought otherwise.

Several oil lanterns hung from support beams. Playing cards and coins were scattered around, as well as three human skeletons. At first, the skeletons startled me, but I quickly recovered and continued my search around toppled chairs. I found another skeleton lying behind a table. Each was dressed in nineteenth century clothing and armed with weaponry from that era. The bodies, except for the one in the hammock, seemed to have been involved in a struggle before they'd died. It wasn't long before I noticed bullet holes in the walls and one column.

Unlike the others, the man in the hammock looked as if he'd died not long ago, yet he was dressed in the same fashion. He had a single bullet wound to the temple. One of his arms hung down, while the other rested beside him. On the floor, next to a brown stain, was a pistol.

I wondered when he'd died. It couldn't have been any later than that day. His body smelled of BO, not decay.

A note lay on his chest. Nearly every word was misspelled, but at least it was in English—my first real clue. After reading it twice, I was able to grasp what the letter meant.

*To my captin, Jon T. Sherbrik,*

*I writ tis to xplain wat hapined. Onc you red tis, you wil understan an not condem me for*

*the achins I hav takin. Dekhand Pal Roy, canon comandor Joshuy Walkor, secint-in-comand Mastor Richerd Troi an my self had com bak to the shep Thrs day nit to play cards whin Mastor Walkor acused Mr. Roy an Mastor Troi of cheeting. To my sham, ech man had ben drinking hevly an thar mind set was most inepproprit. Harsh words wer xchaned between the men an gun fir eruptid. Mr. Roy was shot in the gut an fel ded, an Mr. Walkor was wondid. I saw the devel in his eyes, captin.*

*Mastor Troi trid takin Mistor Walkors pistel whin Mr. Walkor tok owt his sord an sunk it strait in to Mastor Trois bely. I trid to sav him. I puld my gun an fird, kilin por Mr. Walkor. It was to lat for Mastor Troi an I fownd myself alon wit my ded shep mats. I didt want to be hanted by Mistor Walkor, captin. Ater tirty yers in tis God forsakin plac, we al no wat hapins win we kil. I codnt liv that wa. I kiled Mistor Walkor an cold not hav him arownd, tantin me til I go mad. So I hav kiled myself, captan. Ma God show mursy on me.*

*Tomas*

*Febuwry 4<sup>th</sup> 1836*

A tide of questions arose in my head. It wasn't just the misspelling that confused me. If the men's death had happened on the same night, how could it be that all but one—Tomas—had long since decomposed?

"There's no freakin' way this guy died in 1836," I said out loud, as if to someone else in the room—someone with a pulse.

I collected some of the coins strewn across the floor. They were old and American. I saw no other kind of currency, which wasn't surprising if the incident had taken place in 1836, since paper money hadn't been issued in the United States until the Civil War.

My head was spinning and not just because of the strange quality of the air. I wondered what Tomas had meant when he'd said he didn't want to be haunted by the man he'd killed. I placed the note back on Tomas's chest and went topside.

I continued in the same direction I'd been heading before boarding the galleon. After climbing over wreckage and wading through dark water, my heart lurched into my throat. A pale fin drifted across my path. I stopped as it made a U-turn and headed straight toward me.

"Oh shit!"

I fought my way toward a nearby plane rudder. Even though the water was only waist deep, I knew I wouldn't make it to safety before the shark reached me.

I spun around, pulled a flare gun, and fired. I missed my target but it scared the shark long enough for me to reach the plane. I grabbed hold of the rudder and started up. The shark came back and hitched its teeth into my life vest, yanking me into the water, thrashing. I unbuckled the vest and slipped out of it, then grabbed the rudder again, hoisted myself up, and flopped onto the tail of the plane. Breathing heavily, I watched as the shark glided just beneath the surface. It was a baby great white, an inexperienced hunter. That was the only reason I was still alive.

Once it realized I wasn't in the water anymore, it swam off. I lay on the tail section for a long time, collecting myself before I stood up and crossed over to a 1950s Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat. As I neared the cockpit, I saw another dead body. The canopy window had shattered, sending a large shard of glass into the pilot's left eye. Like Tomas, the pilot's body showed no sign of decomposition.

Somehow, the vessels and aircraft—and most of the bodies—remained perfectly preserved. I became more confused by the second, but it was getting late and I had to find a dry place to sleep.

Just as it almost became too dark to see, I caught sight of a blotchy dot—another galleon. Light came from torches lining the railing and through the window of the captain's cabin. I climbed onto a yacht and read the distant ship's name on the stern: *The Pride*. A moment later, I heard gales of laughter booming from inside.

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