

L. RON HUBBARD



THE SKY-CRASHER

GALAXY
P R E S E N T S

NO SOAP

A very restless, fretful Caution Jones was seated at his desk in the main offices of Trans-Continental Airlines. Outwardly he was very neat and precise. His hair was combed until not one strand varied a millimeter from its rightful place. His white collar was straight-pointed, conservative. His tie was a modest shade—gray. His desk was shining, and papers piled thereon were stacked in neat, square-edged piles, like soldiers drawn up on parade.

Through the large square window he could see a corner of the white, square weather tower which rose from the modernistic field headquarters. He was a hundred feet above the flying field and he could see every detail of its activity. At hand he had every operations detail of the line. In the space of seconds he could have talked with any pilot in the air or on the ground between New York and Los Angeles.

He was a perfect general manager. Reserved, quiet, inspiring confidence and efficiency by his exemplary conduct and his unimpeachable decisions.

But for all his outward appearance, he was writhing down deep in his pilot's heart. He held an inter-office communication which said:

♦ L. RON HUBBARD ♦

From: Office of President
To: J. J. Jones, GM, TCA

Enc. find PO Dept. circular, advising all airlines that Washington is considering a survey of round-the-world mail service, passenger service, express service.

Details have been arranged with foreign countries. Project is to be sponsored by the United States to heighten efficiency.

In view of the many foreign lines operating across this route and in these countries, it will be necessary for the accepted airline to demonstrate superiority over foreign means.

This would require that we dispatch a ship, fully equipped on this flight, that said plane would have to successfully complete the circumnavigation of the globe in order to receive PO Dept. backing. The first man to make this flight carrying mail and perhaps passengers will receive priority over all other lines.

The promised net income would be about one million a year.

Let me have your decision on this as soon as possible.

Craig

PS Think it over good.

Caution was thinking it over with all his wits. A complete airline route around the world. A stupendous undertaking, demanding the highest kind of efficiency. A grueling test. It had been done before, several times, by pilots who went out for the glory of it. Now it might become an everyday commercial reality.

He was reaching for his dictaphone when he saw a line in the PO memorandum:

United States Airlines having already announced its readiness. The time of departure will be set for July 15.

One month away.

Caution scowled. He knew what was expected of him. Craig was having a hard enough time making both ends meet with their ordinary runs. United States Airlines had cut deep into their traffic with cutthroat competition.

It would cost around fifty thousand to make that flight—and TCA couldn't afford to lose that fifty thousand.

Caution saw a silver ship far up in the sky. He saw it Immelman, loop twice in a row and then start down in a giddy spin as though it would never come out. With a flash of polished wings, it whipped out, did a dangerous slow roll a thousand feet off the ground and started back upstairs, motor yowling.

He started to say, "Good flying," and then with a scowl, he changed it to, "Damned fool! He'll kill himself!" Pam was always doing something like that, blast her. Where was Pam, anyway? He hadn't seen her for three weeks, and they hadn't been together much since that fatal flight early in the spring.

To the dictaphone, "Advise against this flight as being an expensive risk. Commercial circumnavigation is not feasible in present planes. Participation of United States Airlines bars us through added risk. Jones."

He sighed and pushed a buzzer for a stenographer. When

she came and took the cylinder away he almost stopped her. Somehow he felt depressed.

For an instant he allowed himself to dwell upon the sporting possibilities of that flight. It would be a good race—an exciting one. And if they won— He brought himself up by the mental scruff of his neck. Too much of a risk. Impossible.

The silver plane was still cavorting over the edge of the field, barely falling within the Department of Commerce law on stunt flight. The motor changed its pitch like an angry beast snarling. The sun struck fire from the fabric and the prop. That pilot was having a good time.

“But that sort of thing doesn’t get aviation anywhere,” muttered Caution.

He thought about that for a while. Safe and sane flying advanced flight, stunts retarded it. Aviation was a business, coming out of swaddling clothes. Pilots were no longer half devil, half eagle. They were responsible men who had serious work to do. Aviation was as dangerous as you made it, and until the public stopped thinking that aviation *was* dangerous, airlines would still show their earnings on the red side of the ledger.

Stunts never got anybody any place. Caution said it with a determined clamp of his jaw. This round-the-world service would almost fall under the heading of a stunt.

On his wall he had long ago tacked a chart. It was more decoration than anything else. Done in small galleons and spouting whales, with palms where Africa was outlined and with Pizarro down with the Incas, and with cherubs, blowing with puffed-out cheeks, showing the prevailing wind

directions. Yes, the chart was very ornamental. It showed the routes of Columbus, the more deserving Vasco de Gama, of Magellan. . . .

Caution stood before the chart with his hands behind his back. Magellan's route was traced in dotted lines.

What an undertaking that had been! It had taken from the tenth of August, 1519, until late fall, 1522—a lapse of three years. One thousand days and more. Magellan dead in the Philippines, his ships wrecked and abandoned, his crew dying from scurvy and starvation and thirst, killed by savages, buffeted by mighty storms.

Magellan had accomplished the dream of Columbus, had never lived to see that one vessel, the *Victoria*, limp into port at Spain.

And now they were going to do it regularly, in one week's time.

His nostrils quivered a little. He saw the names on the chart: The Aleutians, Japan, Russia, Poland, Germany and France. Angrily he turned away from the map and threw himself into his desk chair.

Craig, hair bushy and stiff as steel wool, his face the color of raw beef, entered with a militant stride and thumped himself onto the edge of the desk.

"What's this note you sent me?" demanded Craig. "You don't like this world flight?"

"No," said Caution. "That's what I'm paid to do."

"What?"

"See that TCA keeps going."

"But look at that potential earning!"

“United States Airlines,” said Caution, with a shake of his head, “is going in for this thing. And they’re after our scalps. They’re buying up our stocks, cutting our rates and shortening our schedules. Mercer is going to hammer us into the middle of next week. And if Mercer and United States Airlines don’t want us in that race, they’ll see that we stay out, or kill our pilot.”

“Nuts!” said Craig.

“And,” said Caution, “we’re almost on the rocks. We can barely keep running.”

Craig sat up, astonished, blowing hard. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“My job is to keep you from working hard, isn’t it? You have enough to worry you. But you can look at our ledgers. We’re running in the red, and if things don’t pick up, TCA will disappear from the skyways. All the work you and I have done will be gone. Wrecked. We’re lucky to be going at all. We need every pilot to keep us in the air. We need every penny to keep the planes in the air. We *can’t* afford to make that flight.”

“Who said so?”

Caution looked very official, very earnest. “United States Airlines is trying to push us out. If we enter this race—call it yellow if you want—we’ll lose out. We don’t play the game crooked, and they do.”

Craig took the wrapper off a cigar and then began to gnaw upon it as a dog gnaws a bone. He considered Caution for several seconds, speculation in his eye.

“Caution,” said Craig, “if I didn’t know you better, I’d say you *were* yellow.”

Caution took it without a blink. “You pay me to say these things and do these things, not to stunt and romp around like a colt.”

“Sure, sure, I know. But listen here, Caution, I’ve always wondered just what the hell was wrong with you. Now don’t get me wrong. You’re a crack pilot and you’ve got a fine business head. But what’s under all this?”

Caution’s lean face changed. His mouth drew down on one side, his left eye closed ever so little. The expression completely transformed him. It was bitter, reckless. Craig was startled. He had never seen Caution look that way before.

“You want to know the truth?” said Caution. “My dad was Batty Jones. Did you know that?”

“Why—why, yes, I’d heard of it. He was a famous circus pilot, wasn’t he?” the TCA man asked.

“Yes,” said Caution, biting off the word. “A famous circus pilot, nothing more. They called him Batty. He *was* batty. He grew up out of the war. He didn’t give a damn for anything, not even my mother’s feelings or my future. He was a *stunt* pilot.

“He starred with the old Bates Flying Circus, the craziest fools aviation ever bred. He came out of the JN-9 era and flew himself up into the money and fame. He was the idol of all kids. He didn’t have a nerve in his body. He looked like me, but that’s where the resemblance ended.

“One time, off Florida, he flew down a twenty-foot alley

with a plane which spread its wings forty feet. One time he wrecked ships, diving them straight in from thousands of feet, just to give the crowd a thrill. One time he arranged with a pilot so that they'd smash their ships together in midair just to amuse the mob. They did it, and the other pilot died. Batty Jones got out with a busted arm and a scratched ear.

“His stunts were famous. Anything for a stunt. Anything for a thrill. He lived hard and high and fast. He was the best pilot in the world, and he turned that talent into money by amusing people, by giving them chills. He was a *stunt* pilot, get me?”

Craig sat very still, amazed at Caution's wild tone. Caution got up and paced down the room, scowling, eye squinted, mouth drawn bitterly down.

“He wouldn't fly sanely. He wouldn't give aviation a break. No, he dangled off wings, looped ships ready to fall apart, parachuted, cracked up, burned in the air and came out of it every time, grinning.

“A circus pilot. They didn't last long. In 1928 my dad burned the ship in the air, figuring that he could bail out in his chute. A wing hit him when it folded. I watched him burn a thousand feet above the earth. I thought it was just another stunt until I . . . until they . . .

“My mother was worn out with it. The final shock killed her. I greased ships, stole rides, stole time, licked boots, begged an education in the air. And I ordered myself to keep sane and steady. I had to do it, and I've done it. I'm 'Caution' Jones, the levellest head in the business.”

As though suddenly tired, he sat down. When he lit a cigarette, Craig saw that his hand was shaking. He'd never seen Caution like that before.

"Then," said Craig, after a long pause, "I guess we don't want to try that round-the-world flight. You're right, Caution, it's a stunt. No reason to do it. But still—we've got to get out of this hole somehow. I've put my life into TCA, you've given it years yourself. It's all we've got. And we don't want to take a beating lying down just because a gang of crooks like United States Airlines tries to muscle in on it.

"However, we'll find something else, something less spectacular. The round-the-world flight is out."

Unseen by both, the silver ship which had lately been stunting over the field had landed. A slim, booted figure had stepped out, and now that person was standing in the doorway, looking at them.

"What's this about a round-the-world flight?" said Pam Craig, swinging her helmet and goggles back and forth. Her blonde hair was rumpled, her eyes were alight with the joy of living, her mouth was drawn into a reckless smile.

"Pam!" said Craig.

"Where did you come from?" demanded Caution.

"Didn't you see my show?" said Pam, a little grieved. "I did everything but smear in, and you didn't even notice. That isn't very complimentary to my flying!"

"Your stunting," corrected Caution.

"My flying," corrected Pam.

"Where have you been?" said Craig.

“Down to Florida. I had the best time! The air races were simply marvelous. But I didn’t place. I wrecked my landing gear the first day and couldn’t enter.”

“Florida?” said Caution. “That’s high-speed stuff!”

“Well, look at my plane!” invited Pam.

The two men glanced out the window and saw the silver wings crouched before the hangar. The ship was mostly motor, built for speed, a small, wicked crate, hard to handle, capable of six miles a minute.

“Where did you get that?” Craig barked.

“Bought it,” said Pam, seating herself on the desk. She cleared away the orderly papers by simply knocking them off with her hand. Caution, the soul of neatness, growled deep in his throat.

“You’ll spend every cent you’ve got,” said Craig.

“My mother left it for me to spend, didn’t she? And besides, I’ve still got seventy-five thousand dollars, and when that’s gone, TCA will have a job for me. You’ll make me a line pilot—and I’ll be so famous you’ll have to pay me seven hundred a month.”

Her silver-gray eyes were filled with audacity. She was small, about five feet two, but her enthusiastic, vibrant bearing seemed to give her height.

Craig snorted. “What good would *you* be as a line pilot?”

Caution nodded sagely. “What would we want of a stunter on this line? You’d better save your money, Pam.”

“You’d better save your advice, Mister Caution. Now what’s this I hear of a round-the-world flight in which we’re taking part?”

“We’re not taking part,” said Craig. “It’s too much of a risk. We’re staying home this time.”

Pam looked downcast about it. “You mean—you mean you’ll let United States Airlines walk away with it?”

Caution was very uncomfortable. “We’re not letting anyone do anything, Pam. It’s too much of a risk. The flight will cost over fifty thousand, without including the possible loss of the plane. We simply can’t take the loss, that’s all.”

Pam started out, very thoughtful, lower lip caught in her teeth.

Caution watched her go with a queer sensation in his throat. She was beautiful, gay, reckless, completely demoralizing, and if he would only admit it, he admired and respected her.

“Stunt pilot!” said Caution Jones as scornfully as he could, and went back to his work.