

Jay and Zhou tried to make up the time but it was no use. They had lost their rhythm. “One two three turn!” Zhou shouted with a crackle in his voice on pylon two. Jay made the turn but he had to cut his airspeed to make sure he did not muff it again.

Gold plane whipped ahead as if he had afterburners ignited, handily cutting pylons two, three and four. He finished the course and flew by the bleachers, dipped his wing to the crowd. They broke into cheers and applause. Whoever this guy is he’s a showoff, Jay thought. Gold streamed across the finish line.

Kent picked up his microphone and addressed the gathered onlookers in the stands. “We have a winner! Gold plane comes in first place during its first heat here at the airfield with a score of twenty four points! In second place green plane, piloted by Jay Smalley and Peter Zhou! Congratulations!”

“Tough break,” said Zhou. “Guy knows how to fly. We’ll nail him next time.”

Jay remained silent. He was in a funk. He circled the green *Quickie* and began his descent towards the tarmac. He brought her in on a normal glide path and tucked into a perfect landing attitude. The landing gear met the concrete and Jay taxied past the bleachers toward the main pit area. The main runway was backed up with a line of planes awaiting approval for take-off.

These were the participants for the next event, the monthly *free fly*. There was a Boeing Model 40 postal plane, a DC9, a B52 bomber, a P51 Mustang. Certainly a diversity of aircraft that would clog the throughput of any normal airport. But this was not any old airport. It was a miniature airport designed and approved by the Aeronautical Modeling Association (AMA) for remotely-controlled powered aircraft of five different categories: radio controlled fixed wing,

heavier than two pounds (runway #1), radio controlled fixed wing, two pounds or less (runway #2) radio controlled helicopters and drones (helicopter pad) control-line aircraft (U-control circles).

Jay steered the green Quickie off the main runway and on to the taxiway. The main runway was about six hundred feet long, with three taxiways leading off its main artery. He and Zhou stepped out of their designated pilot stand and walked over to retrieve their aircraft. Jay closed the antenna on his remote transmitter as he walked. "I'm sorry," he told Zhou. "I was a jerk back there. None of this was your fault. He just outflew me, that's all."

"Everyone's entitled to an off day," Zhou replied as he picked up the Quickie and inspected her for any damage. She had a wing span of fifty two inches and weighed about three and a half pounds. They walked over to the *Pilot's Pit*, a covered area with benches and tables where pilots could tweak their aircraft, commiserate and talk shop. This was the "hangar" of the airfield. Next to the pilot's pit was the snack shack where hungry remote-controlled aviators could purchase hot dogs, soda pops and other sustenance for a long day at the field.

"Jay! There's someone I want you to meet!" yelled Kent as he climbed down from the tower. The tower was a former lifeguard station made of two by fours and plywood. It was painted a bright red, white and blue. Jay stopped in his tracks and turned back. Zhou followed, carrying the green Quickie.

They met Kent back at the pilot's pit and he waved over a slim, fit, sun-tanned guy of about thirty-eight. He wore combat fatigue pants and a camo sweatshirt with a blue boonie cap. "Jay, I'd like you to meet Captain Oren Frazer. His dad and I flew Hueys in Vietnam. He's a veteran Air Force officer in his own right. Recently retired and moved to our neighborhood."

Captain Frazer carried his gold *Quickie*: the one that had blown Jay and Zhou out of the water in the race.

“Nice heat,” Jay replied. “Pleasure to meet you.” He put out his hand and Frazer met it with a fist bump. “What kind of birds did you fly?”

“F15 Eagle, E11A, T-38 Talon and some experimental stuff that’s classified,” Oren replied.

“Where were you stationed?” asked Zhou.

“All over, really. I have flown all over the world,” Oren answered. “Again, some of my missions were classified.”

“Why did you retire so soon sir?” asked Jay. “Wouldn’t you rather be flying real birds?”

“Jay, I’m not sure that question is appropriate...” Kent averred.

“No, it’s okay!” Oren went on. “Of course I would rather fly real birds!” he said. “I had a bit of an injury. It’s fine now but it made me realize that I’ve got some other goals in my life that I want to pursue.”

“Sorry for prying, sir,” Jay apologized.

“No apology necessary.” Oren smiled.

“You can ask the Captain any other personal questions later,” Kent jibed.

“The flying field has always been my temple, my church and my gym. So expect to see a lot of me!” Oren took a step back behind Kent. “And please, call me Oren. None of this *sir* or *Captain Frazer* stuff.”

“And don’t feel bad that you lost, Jay! If you had to lose you might as well lose to the best in the business, right?” Kent quipped.

“Sure,” Jay said. Although it gave him little consolation. He needed to keep his stats high to remain on track to fly in the AMA youth scholarship competition. Kent and Oren walked off towards a brand new high end Winnebago in the parking lot. Many of the older, more affluent hobbyists would come to the airfield in mobile “man caves” where they could hang out and tinker with their aircraft in air conditioned comfort.

Jay and Zhou packed up their winning aircraft and placed it in its kit case. “He’s got a nice RV,” Zhou observed, as Kent and Oren entered the Winnebago.

“That thing’s got to be a 100K plus,” Jay noted. “How do you afford something like that on an Air Force pension?”

“It’s called credit,” Zhou replied.

“Yeah but the payments have got to be enormous!” Jay said.

“I don’t know,” Zhou remarked. “How do people afford houses? Cars? Boats? Maybe his family has money.”

“Maybe,” Jay said. He noticed the Winnebago had a trailer behind it. The canopy was off and on the trailer bed was a giant, one-fifth scale F16 jet. She was beautiful, with perfect

combat green paint on the fuselage and wings and red, white and blue trim on the missiles and tail. It was obvious no expense had been spared on this rig.