

Operation Northwoods

Jack Swyteck

by James Grippando, 1958-

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All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention.



6:20 a.m., Miami, Florida

Jack Swyteck swatted the alarm clock, but even the subtle green glow of liquid-crystal digits was an assault on his eyes. The ringing continued. He raked his

hand across the nightstand, grabbed the telephone and answered in a voice that dripped with a hangover. It was Theo.

“Theo who?” said Jack.

“Theo Knight, moron.”

Jack’s brain was obviously still asleep. Theo was Jack’s best friend and “investigator,” for lack of a better term. Whatever Jack needed, Theo found, whether it was the last prop plane out of Africa or an explanation for a naked corpse in Jack’s bathtub. Jack never stopped wondering how Theo came up with these things. Sometimes he asked; more often, he simply didn’t want to know. Theirs was not exactly a textbook friendship, the Ivy League son of a governor meets the black high-school dropout from Liberty City. But they got on just fine for two guys who’d met on death row, Jack the lawyer and Theo the inmate. Jack’s persistence had delayed Theo’s date with the electric chair long enough for DNA evidence to come into vogue and prove him innocent. It wasn’t the original plan, but Jack ended up a part of Theo’s new life, sometimes going along for the ride, other times just watching with amazement as Theo made up for lost time.

“Dude, turn on your TV,” said Theo. “CNN.”

There was an urgency in Theo’s voice, and Jack was too disoriented to mount an argument. He found the remote and switched on the set, watching from the foot of his bed.

A grainy image filled the screen, like bad footage from one of those media helicopters covering a police car chase. It was an aerial shot of a compound of some sort. Scores of small dwellings and other, larger buildings dotted the windswept landscape. There were patches of green, but overall the terrain had an arid quality, perfect for iguanas and banana rats—except for all the fences. Jack noticed miles of them. One-and two-lane roads cut across the topography like tiny scars, and a slew of vehicles seemed to be moving at high speed, though they looked like matchbox cars from this vantage point. In the background, a huge, black plume of smoke was rising like a menacing funnel cloud.

“What’s going on?” he said into the phone.

“They’re at the naval base in Guantanamo Bay. It’s about your client.”

“My client? Which one?”

“The crazy one.”

“That doesn’t exactly narrow things down,” said Jack.

“You know, the Haitian saint,” said Theo.

Jack didn’t bother to tell him that he wasn’t actually a saint. “You mean Jean Saint Preux? What did he do?”

“What did he do?” said Theo, scoffing. “He set the fucking naval base on fire.”

6:35 a.m., Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

Camp Delta was a huge, glowing ember on the horizon, like the second rising of the sun. The towering plume of black smoke rose ever higher, fed feverishly by the raging furnace below. A gentle breeze from the Windward Passage only seemed to worsen matters—too weak to clear the smoke, just strong enough to spread a

gloomy haze across the entire southeastern corner of the U.S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Major Frost Jorgenson was speeding due south in the passenger seat of a U.S. marine Humvee. Even with the windows shut tight, the seeping smoke was making his eyes water.

“Unbelievable,” he said as they drew closer to the camp.

“Yes, sir,” said his driver. “Biggest fire I’ve ever seen.”

Major Jorgenson was relatively new to “Gitmo,” part of the stepped-up presence of U.S. Marines that had come with the creation of a permanent detention facility at Camp Delta for “enemy combatants”—suspected terrorists who had never been charged formally with a crime. Jorgenson was a bruiser even by marine standards. Four years of college football at Grambling University had prepared him well for a life of discipline, and old habits die hard. Before sunrise, he’d already run two miles and peeled off two hundred sit-ups. He was stepping out of the shower, dripping wet, when the telephone call had come from Fire Station No. 1. An explosion at Camp Delta. Possible casualties. Fire/Rescue dispatched. No details as yet. Almost immediately, he was fielding calls from his senior officers, including the brigadier general in charge of the entire detainee program, all of whom were demanding a situation report, pronto.

A guard waved them through the Camp Delta checkpoint.

“Unbelievable.” The major was slightly embarrassed for having repeated himself, but it was involuntary, the only word that seemed to fit.

The Humvee stopped, and the soldiers rushed to strap on their gas masks as they jumped out of the vehicle. A wave of heat assaulted the major immediately, a stifling blow, as if he’d carelessly tossed a match onto a pile of oversoaked charcoal briquettes. Instinctively he brought a hand to his face, even though he was protected by the mask. After a few moments, the burning sensation subsided, but the visibility was only getting worse. Depending on the wind, it was like stepping into a foggy twilight, the low morning sun unable to penetrate the smoke. He grabbed a flashlight from the glove compartment.

Major Jorgenson walked briskly, stepping over rock-hard fire hoses and fallen debris, eventually finding himself in the staging area for the firefighting team from Fire Station No. 2. Thick, noxious smoke made it impossible to see beyond the three nearest fire trucks, though he was sure there were more, somewhere in the darkness. At least he hoped there were more. Once again, the heat was on him like a blanket, but even more stifling was the noise all around him—radios crackling, sirens blaring, men shouting. Loudest of all was the inferno itself, an endless surge of flames emitting a noise that was peculiar to fires this overwhelming, a strange cross between a roaring tidal wave and a gigantic wet bedsheet flapping in the breeze.

“Watch it!”

Directly overhead, a stream of water arched from the turret of a massive, yellow truck. It was one of several three-thousand-gallon airport rescue and firefighting machines on the base, capable of dousing flames with 165 gallons of water per minute. It wasn’t even close to being enough.

“Coming through!” A team of stretcher bearers streaked past. Major Jorgenson caught a glimpse of the blackened shell of a man on the gurney, his arms and legs

twisted and shriveled like melted plastic. On impulse, he ran alongside and then took up the rear position, relieving one of the stretcher bearers who seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

“Dear God,” he said. But his heart sank even further as the lead man guided the stretcher right past the ambulance to a line of human remains behind the emergency vehicles. The line was already too long to bear. They rolled the charred body onto the pavement.

“Major, in here!”

He turned and saw the fire chief waving him toward the side of the fire truck. An enlisted man stepped in to relieve his commanding officer of stretcher duty. The major commended him and then hurried over to join the chief inside the cab, pulling off his mask as the door closed behind him.

The fire chief was covered with soot, his expression incredulous. “With all due respect, sir, what are you doing out here?”

“Same as you,” said the major. “Is it as bad as it looks?”

“Maybe worse, sir.”

“How many casualties?”

“Six marines unaccounted for so far. Eleven injured.”

“What about detainees?”

“Easier to count survivors at this point.”

“How many?”

“So far, none.”

The major felt his gut tighten. None. No survivors. A horrible result—even worse when you had to explain it to the rest of the world.

The fire chief picked a flake of ash from his eye and said, “Sir, we’re doing our best to fight this monster. But any insight you can give me as to how this started could be a big help.”

“Plane crash,” the major reported. “That’s all we know now. Civilian craft. Cessna.”

Just then, a team of F-16s roared across the skies overhead. Navy fighter jets had been circling the base since the invasion of airspace.

“Civilian plane, huh? It may not be my place to ask, but how did that happen?”

“You’re right. It’s not your place to ask.”

“Yes, sir. But for the safety of my own men, I guess what I’m getting at is this: if there’s something inside this facility that we should know about... I mean something of an explosive or incendiary nature—”

“This is a detention facility. Nothing more.”

“One heck of a blaze for a small civilian aircraft that crashed into nothing more than a detention facility.”

The major took another look through the windshield. He couldn’t argue.

The chief said, “I may look like an old geezer, but I know a thing or two about fires. A little private plane crashing into a building doesn’t carry near enough fuel to start a fire like this. These bodies we’re pulling out of here, we’re not talking third-degree burns. Upward of eighty-five, ninety percent of them, it’s fourth- and even fifth-degree, some of them cooked right down to the bone. And that smell in the air, benzene all the way.”

“What is it you’re trying to tell me?”

“I know napalm when I see it.”

The major turned his gaze back toward the fire, then pulled his encrypted cellular phone from his pocket and dialed the naval station command suite.

7:02 a.m., Miami, Florida

Jack increased the volume to hear the rapid-fire cadence of an anchorwoman struggling to make sense of the image on the TV screen.

“You are looking at a live scene at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay,” said the newswoman. “We have no official confirmation, but CNN has obtained unofficial reports that, just after sunrise, there was an explosion on the base. A large and intense fire is still burning, but because both the United States and the Cuban military enforce a buffer zone around the base, we cannot send in our own camera crew for a closer look.

“Joining me now live by telephone is CNN military analyst David Polk, a retired naval officer who once served as base commander at Guantanamo. Mr. Polk, as you watch the television screen along with us, can you tell us anything that might help us better understand what we’re viewing?”

“As you can see, Deborah, the base is quite large, covering about forty-five square miles on the far southeastern tip of Cuba, about four hundred air miles from Miami. To give you a little history, the U.S. has controlled this territory since the Spanish American War, and the very existence of a military base there has been a source of friction in U.S./Cuba relations since Fidel Castro took power. There is no denying that this is Cuban soil. However, for strategic reasons, the U.S. has clung to this very valuable turf, relying on a seventy-year-old treaty that essentially allows the United States to stay as long as it wishes.”

“We’ve heard reports of an explosion. Has anything of this nature ever happened before at Guantanamo?”

“No. Tensions have certainly run high over the years, spiking in the early sixties with the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis, and spiking again in 1994 when sixty-thousand Cuban and Haitian refugees were detained at Guantanamo. But never anything like this.”

“What might cause an explosion and fire like this at the base?”

“That would be pure speculation at this juncture. We’ll have to wait and see.”

“Can you pinpoint the location of the fire for me? What part of the base appears to be affected?”

“It’s the main base. What I mean by that is that Guantanamo is a bifurcated base. The airstrip is on the western or leeward side. The main base is to the east, across the two-and-a-half-mile stretch of water that is Guantanamo Bay. You can see part of the bay in the upper left-hand corner of your television screen.”

“What part of the main base is burning?”

“It’s the southern tip, which is known as Radio Range because of the towering radio antennae that you can see in your picture. Interestingly enough, the fire is concentrated in what appears to be Camp Delta, which is the new high-security detention facility.”

“Camp Delta was built to house suspected terrorists, am I right?”

“The official terminology is *enemy combatant*. Originally, the only detainees there were the alleged members of the al-Qaeda terrorist network. In recent months, however, the United States has broadened the definition of *enemy combatant*. As a result, Camp Delta now houses drug lords and rebels from South America, suspected war criminals from Chechnya, kidnappers and thugs from Cambodia and a host of others who meet the Defense Department’s definition of *enemy combatant* in the ever-widening war on terrorism.”

“This whole issue of detainees—this has become quite an international sore spot for President Howe, has it not?”

“That’s an understatement. You have to remember that none of the detainees at this facility has ever been charged with a crime. This all goes back to what I said earlier—the base is on Cuban soil. The Department of Defense has successfully argued in the U.S. federal courts that the base is not *sovereign* territory and that inmates therefore have no due-process rights under the U.S. Constitution. The White House has taken the position that the military can hold the prisoners indefinitely. But pressure has steadily risen in the international community to force the U.S. either to charge the detainees with specific crimes or release them.”

“Some of these detainees are quite dangerous, I’m sure.”

“Even the president’s toughest antiterrorism experts are beginning to worry about the growing clamor over holding prisoners indefinitely without formal charges. On the other hand, you could probably make a pretty strong case that some of these guys are among the most dangerous men in the world. So Camp Delta is a bit of a steaming political hot potato.”

“Which has just burst into flames—literally.”

“I think this is on the verge of becoming one of the toughest issues President Howe will face in his second term—What should be done with all these enemy combatants that we’ve rounded up and put into detention without formal charges?”

“From the looks of things, someone may have come up with a solution.”

“I wasn’t suggesting that at all, but—”

“Mr. Polk, thank you for joining us. CNN will return with more live coverage of the fire at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, after these commercial messages.”

Jack hit the mute button on the remote. “You still there?” he asked over the phone.

“Yeah,” said Theo. “Can you believe he did it?”

“Did what?”

“They said it was a Cessna. Wake up, dude. It’s Operation Northwoods.”

There was a pounding on the door. It had that certain thud of authority—law enforcement. “Open up. FBI!”

Jack gripped the phone. “Theo, I think this lawyer may need a lawyer.”

There was a crash at the front door, and it took Jack only a moment to realize that a SWAT team had breached his house. Jack could hear them coming down the hall, see them burst through the bedroom door. “Down, down, on the floor!” someone shouted, and Jack instinctively obeyed. He had never claimed to be the world’s smartest lawyer, but he was sharp enough to realize that when six guys come running into your bedroom in full SWAT regalia before dawn, generally they

mean business. He decided to save the soapbox speech on civil liberties for another day, perhaps when his face wasn't buried in the carpet and the automatic rifles weren't aimed at the back of his skull.

"Where's Jack Swytek?" one of the men barked at him.

"I'm Jack Swytek."

There was silence, and it appeared that the team leader was checking a photograph to confirm Jack's claim. The man said, "Let him up, boys."

Jack rose and sat on the edge of the bed. He was wearing gym shorts and a Miami Dolphins jersey, his version of pajamas. The SWAT team backed away. The team leader pointed his gun at the floor and introduced himself as Agent Matta, FBI.

"Sorry about the entrance," Matta said. "We got a tip that you were in danger."

"A tip? From who?"

"Anonymous."

Jack was somewhat skeptical. He was, after all, a criminal defense lawyer.

"We need to talk to you about your client, Jean Saint Preux. Did he act alone?"

"I don't even know if he's done anything yet."

"Save it for the courtroom," Matta said. "I need to know if there are more planes on the way."

Jack suddenly understood the guns-drawn entrance. "What are you talking about?"

"Your client has been flying in the Windward Passage for some time now, hasn't he?"

"Yeah. He's Haitian. People are dying on the seas trying to flee the island. He's been flying humanitarian missions to spot rafters lost at sea."

"How well do you know him?"

"He's just a client. Met him on a pro bono immigration case I did ten years ago. Look, you probably know more than I do. Are you sure it was him?"

"I think you can confirm that much for us with the air traffic control recordings." He pulled a CD from inside his pocket, then said, "It's been edited down to compress the time frame of the engagement, but it's still highly informative."

Jack was as curious as anyone to know if his client was involved—if he was alive or dead. "Let's hear it," he said.

Matta inserted the CD into the player on Jack's credenza. There were several seconds of dead air. Finally a voice crackled over the speakers: "*This is approach control, U.S. Naval Air Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Unidentified aircraft heading one-eight-five at one-five knots, identify yourself.*"

Another stretch of silence followed. The control tower repeated its transmission. Finally, a man replied, his voice barely audible, but his Creole accent was still detectable. "Copy that."

Jack said, "That's Jean."

The recorded voice of the controller continued, "*You are entering unauthorized airspace. Please identify.*"

No response.

"*Fighter planes have been dispatched. Please identify.*"

Jack moved closer to hear. It sounded as though his client was having trouble breathing.

The controller's voice took on a certain urgency. *"Unidentified aircraft, your transponder is emitting code seven-seven-hundred. Do you have an emergency?"*

Again there was silence, and then a new voice emerged. *"Yeah, Guantanamo, this is Mustang."*

Matta leaned across the desk and paused the CD just long enough to explain, "That's the navy fighter pilot."

The recording continued: *"We have a visual. White Cessna one-eighty-two with blue stripes. N-number—November two six Golf Mike. One pilot aboard. No passengers."*

The controller said, *"November two six Golf Mike, please confirm the code seven-seven-hundred. Are you in distress?"*

"Affirmative."

"Identify yourself."

"Jean Saint Preux."

"What is the nature of your distress?"

"I... I think I'm having a heart attack."

The controller said, *"Mustang, do you still have a visual?"*

"Affirmative. The pilot appears to be slumped over the yoke. He's flying on automatic."

"November two six Golf Mike, you have entered unauthorized airspace. Do you read?"

He did not reply.

"This is Mustang. MiGs on the way. Got a pair of them approaching at two-hundred-forty degrees, west-northwest."

Matta looked at Jack and said, "Those are the Cuban jets. They don't take kindly to private craft in Cuban airspace."

The recorded voice of the controller said, *"November two six Golf Mike, do you request permission to land?"*

"Yes," he said, his voice straining. *"Can't go back."*

The next voice was in Spanish, and the words gave Jack chills. *"Attention. You have breached the sovereign airspace of the Republic of Cuba. This will be your only warning. Reverse course immediately, or you will be fired upon as hostile aircraft."*

The controller said, *"November two six Golf Mike, you must alter course to twenty, south-southwest. Exit Cuban airspace and enter the U.S. corridor. Do you read?"*

Matta paused the recording and said, "There's a narrow corridor that U.S. planes can use to come and go from the base. He's trying to get Saint Preux into the safety zone."

The recording continued, *"November two six Golf Mike, do you read?"*

Before Saint Preux could reply, the Cubans issued another warning in Spanish. *"Reverse course immediately, or you will be fired upon as hostile aircraft."*

"November two six Golf Mike, do you read?"

"He's hand signaling," said Mustang. *"I think he's unable to talk."*

The controller said, *"November two six Golf Mike, steer two-twenty, south-southwest. Align yourself with the lead navy F-16 and you will be escorted to landing. Permission to land at Guantanamo Bay has been granted."*

Jack's gaze drifted off toward the window, the drama in the Cuban skies playing out in his mind.

"Mustang, what's your status?" asked the controller.

"We're in the corridor. Target is back on automatic pilot."

"Do you have the craft in sight?"

"Yes. I'm on his wing now. That maneuver away from the MiGs really took it out of him. Pilot looks to be barely conscious. Dangerous situation here."

"November two six Golf Mike, please hand signal our pilot if you are conscious and able to hear this transmission."

After a long stretch of silence, Mustang said, *"Got it. He just signaled."*

The controller said, *"Permission has been granted to land on runway one. You are surrounded by four F-16s, and they are authorized to fire immediately upon any deviation from the proper course. Do you read?"*

There was silence, then a response from Mustang. *"He's got it."*

"Roger. Mustang, lead the way."

After thirty seconds of dead air, the controller returned. *"Mustang, what's your unaided visibility?"*

"Our friend should be seeing fine. Approaching the south end of the main base."

Matta used another stretch of silence to explain, saying, "The main base is to the east of the landing strip. They have to pass over the main base, and then fly across the bay in order to land."

"Whoa!" shouted Mustang. *"Target is in a nosedive!"*

"November two six Golf Mike, pull up!"

"Still in a nosedive," shouted Mustang, his voice racing.

"Pull up immediately!"

"No change," said Mustang.

"November two six Golf Mike, final warning. Regain control of your craft or you will be fired upon."

"He's headed straight for Camp Delta."

"Fire at will!"

A shrill, screeching noise came over the speakers. Then silence.

Matta hit the STOP button. "That's it," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. Slowly, he walked around the desk and returned to his seat in the wing chair.

Jack was stone silent. He wasn't particularly close to Saint Preux, but it was still unnerving to think of what had just happened to him.

Matta said, "Did Mr. Saint Preux have heart trouble?"

"Not to my knowledge. But he had pancreatic cancer. The doctors gave him only a few months to live."

"Did he ever talk of suicide?"

"Not to me."

"Was he depressed, angry?"

"Who wouldn't be? The guy was only sixty-three years old. But that doesn't mean he deliberately crashed his plane into Camp Delta."

Matta said, “Do you know of any reason he might have to hate the U.S. government?”

Jack hesitated.

Matta said, “Look, I understand that you’re his lawyer and you have confidentiality issues. But your client’s dead, and so are six U.S. Marines, not to mention scores of detainees. We need to understand what happened.”

“All I can tell you is that he wasn’t happy about the way the government treats refugees from Haiti. Thinks we have a double standard for people of color. I’m not trying to slap a Jesse Jackson rhyme on you, but as the saying goes—If you’re black, you go back.”

“Was he unhappy enough to blow up a naval base?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you do know,” said Matta, his voice taking on an edge. He was suddenly invading Jack’s space, getting right in his face. “I believe that the heart attack was a ruse. I think this was a planned and deliberate suicide attack by a man who had less than six months to live. And I suspect the logistical support and financial backing for an organization that only you can help us identify.”

“That’s ridiculous,” said Jack.

“Are you going to sit there and pretend that he didn’t mention any plans to you, any organizations?”

Jack was about to tell him that he couldn’t answer that even if he’d wanted to, that conversations with his client—even a dead client—were privileged and confidential. But one thing did come to mind, and it wasn’t privileged. Jean had said it in front of Jack, in front of Theo and in front of about a half-dozen other drunks at Theo’s tavern. Jack could share it freely.

“He mentioned something called Operation Northwoods.”

Matta went ash-white. He turned, walked into the next room, and was immediately talking on his encrypted cell phone.

7:40 p.m., Two Weeks Later

Sparky’s Tavern was on U.S. 1 south of Homestead, one of the last watering holes before a landscape that still bore the scars of a direct hit from Hurricane Andrew in 1992 gave way to the splendor of the Florida Keys. It was a converted old gas station with floors so stained from tipped drinks that not even the Environmental Protection Agency could have determined if more flammable liquids had spilled before or after the conversion. The grease pit was gone but the garage doors were still in place. There was a long, wooden bar, a TV permanently tuned to ESPN, and a never-ending stack of quarters on the pool table. Beer was served in cans, and the empties were crushed in true Sparky’s style at the old tire vise that still sat on the workbench. It was the kind of dive that Jack would have visited if it were in his own neighborhood, but he made the forty-minute trip for one reason only: the bartender was Theo Knight.

“Another one, buddy?”

He was serving Jack shots of tequila. “No thanks,” said Jack.

“Come on. Try just one *without* training wheels,” he said as he cleared the lemons and saltshaker from the bar top.

Jack’s thoughts were elsewhere. “I met with a former military guy today,” said Jack. “Says he knows all about Operation Northwoods.”

“Does he also know all about the tooth fairy and the Easter Bunny?”

“He worked in the Pentagon under the Kennedy administration.”

Theo poured another shot, but Jack didn’t touch it. “Talk to me,” said Theo.

“He showed me a memo that was top secret for years. It was declassified a few years ago, but somehow it never got much press, even though it was titled *Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba*. The Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted it to the Defense Department a few months after the Bay of Pigs invasion. No one denies that the memo existed, though former Secretary of Defense McNamara has gone on record saying he never saw it. Anyway, it outlines a plan called Operation Northwoods.”

“So there really was an Operation Northwoods? Pope Paul wasn’t just high on painkillers?”

“His name was Saint Preux, moron. And it was just a memo, not an actual operation. The idea was for the U.S. military to stage terrorist activities at Guantanamo and blame them on Cuba, which would draw the United States into war with Cuba.”

“Get out.”

“Seriously. The first wave was to have friendly Cubans dressed in Cuban military uniforms start riots at the base, blow up ammunition at the base, start fires, burn aircraft, sabotage a ship in the harbor and sink a ship near the harbor entrance.”

“Sounds like a plot for a bad movie.”

“It gets better—or worse, depending on your perspective. They talked about having a *Remember the Maine* incident where the U.S. would blow up one of its own ships in Guantanamo Bay and blame Cuba.”

“But how could they do that without hurting their own men?”

“They couldn’t. And this was actually in the memo—I couldn’t believe what I was reading. It said, *Casualty lists in U.S. newspapers would cause a healthy wave of national indignation.*”

Theo winced, but it might have been the tequila. “They didn’t actually do any of this shit, did they?”

“Nah. Somebody in the Pentagon came to their senses. But still, it makes you wonder if Jean was trying to tell us something about a twenty-first-century Operation Northwoods.”

Theo nodded, seeming to follow his logic. “A plane crash on the base, a few U.S. casualties, and *voilà!* The burning question of what to do with six hundred terrorists is finally resolved. Could never happen, right?”

“Nah. Could never—” Jack stopped himself. President Lincoln Howe was on television. “Turn that up, buddy.”

Theo climbed atop a bar stool and adjusted the volume. On screen, President Lincoln Howe was delivering a prime-time message with his broad shoulders squared to the microphone, his forceful tone conveying the full weight of his office.

The world could only admire the presidential resolve of a former general in the United States Army.

“The FBI and Justice Department have worked tirelessly and swiftly on this investigation,” said the president. “It is our very firm conclusion that Mr. Saint Preux acted alone. He filled a civilian aircraft with highly explosive materials to create the equivalent of a flying eight-hundred-pound napalm bomb. Through means of deception, which included a fake medical emergency, he gained permission to land at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Guantanamo. In accordance with his premeditated scheme, the plane exploded and created a rain of fire over Camp Delta, killing six U.S. Marines and over six hundred detainees, and injuring many others.

“Naturally, our prayers and sympathies go out to the victims and their families. But I wish to emphasize that the speed with which we addressed this incident demonstrates that we will pursue terrorists and terrorist groups in whatever criminal guise they take, irrespective of whether they target American soldiers, innocent civilians or even foreign enemy combatants whom the United States has lawfully detained and taken into custody.”

The president paused, as if giving his sound bite time to gel, then narrowed his eyes for a final comment. “Make no mistake about it. Although most of the victims were detained enemy combatants, this attack at Guantanamo was an attack on democracy and the United States of America. With Mr. Saint Preux’s death, however, justice has been done. Good night, thank you, and may God bless America.”

Jack remained glued to the television as the president stepped away from the podium. Reporters sprang from their seats and started firing questions, but the president simply waved and turned away. The network commentators jumped in with their recap and analysis, but Jack’s mind was awl with his own thoughts. Was Operation Northwoods for real? Did Jack’s client do this as a favor to the U.S. government? Or did he do it to embarrass the Howe administration, as a way to make the world think that the president had put him up to this? None of those questions had been answered.

Or maybe they had.

Theo switched off the television. “Guess that settles it,” he said, laying on a little more than his usual sarcasm. “Just another pissed-off Haitian crashing his airplane into a naval base to protest U.S. immigration policy.”

Jack lifted his shot glass of tequila. “I’m ready.”

“For what?”

He glanced at the lemon and saltshaker, then stiffened his resolve. “I’m losing the training wheels.”

