

# The Sky-What Limit?

*by strannikov*

Lighter-than-air flight was back. The skies of the coast were alight with colorful balloons, dirigibles, and zeppelins tethered to their docking towers along the beach, the huge aircraft bobbing in the breeze up and down the coast for miles, the waters along shore bobbing with boats. The coast's skies presented enough of a genuine spectacle to leave even some adolescent mouths agape. Serrata, for one, marveled at the sight. The boats and craft bobbing in the water made a less favorable impression, since she'd arrived by boat. Serrata had never flown and emphatically would not mind not crossing the Atlantic in a 28-foot tub, fiberglass or no. She scanned the local skies for the lighter-than-air craft she would commandeer for Bordeaux.

She was by most accounts the most imaginative and intrepid 14-year-old in her class. Plausible confirmation came once Serrata located the tether-release switch in the cockpit of the zeppelin. She deftly escorted her stepmother to the cabin door and into the waiting surf a hundred feet below. Because the pilot and crew had not yet boarded, the affable Dutch stewardess would have to navigate. (That the stewardess, for all her affability, spoke only Dutch proved hardly any impediment at all.) ((The management in no way implies that simple fluency in Dutch confers superior navigational skill.))

Serrata had had the happy foresight to bring along the relevant page torn from a Michelin road atlas. Passing Bermuda from the south entailed a minor course adjustment, but the stewardess remained affable. (That she remained affable, Dutch, a stewardess, and a mostly reliable navigator is one vast collision of coincidence.) By the time they glided by just north of the Azores, Serrata had mastered roll and yaw but not pitch. Some Azoreans exclaimed about the zeppelin that bounced by, now on its nose, now on its tail—at least it wasn't spinning round and round uncontrollably! Serrata and the stewardess waved to the Azoreans

below. With no thought of compensating for the lack of pitch control, the stewardess plotted a new course: due north from the Azores, then a hard right into the Bay of Biscay. Bordeaux, here we come!

Ambient light rising from the vicinity of the Channel Islands caused turbulence to build from the north, however. Excessive flatulence rising from the port of Southampton did not help with the steering, either. "Tough news," the stewardess confessed to Serrata in English with an odd Frisian color. "The rudder cables have been compromised by exposure to dysentery. We may need parachutes!" Sadly, three parachutes were found on board, meaning that one parachute would have to plummet to earth unescorted and all alone. As a gesture of consolation, the stewardess jettisoned the unaccompanied parachute from the end of a bungee cord tied above her left ankle. She then shimmied back up the bungee cord into the cabin of the zeppelin to put on her parachute. "I think we did well to get this far," Serrata observed as she buckled herself into her own chute.

For good or ill, the waters of the Bay of Biscay looked exactly like a very runny Brie. "Let's wait for land," Serrata judged. The stewardess nodded affably in agreement, thereby agreeing affably with a nod. (Unbeknownst to the narrator, the stewardess was just completing a correspondence course in English.) To no one's surprise, after bouncing over Bordeaux, Serrata and the stewardess spotted some well-tended vineyards, and as the zeppelin tumbled toward inevitable collision with Mont Blanc, they both jumped from the sleek gondola. Although a minor, Serrata aimed for the rows of pinot noir. The stewardess aimed for the Chardonnay. Safely landed, the two were much relieved to find the lone, unescorted parachute nestled safely amidst the merlot. The Board for Commercial Zeppelin Flight would conduct a fresh parachute inventory in consequence.

Serrata thanked the stewardess for her service as navigator and paid her back wages in pinot blanc. The stewardess promptly embarked on a quest for Belgian citizenship and brushed up on her Frisian. Serrata hitchhiked to the coast looking for a westbound

zeppelin, this was such fun! Owing to the minor tumult caused by her first transatlantic flight, she'd had to forge the BCZF boarding pass she'd need. A handsome teal dirigible with fire engine-red trim caught her eye—one with automatic pitch control! Once the navigator clambered aboard, Serrata knew that she'd be home in time for summer camp. “What—is this?” she asked the startled Portuguese navigator once she'd gripped the tether-release lever.

Serrata would earn her zeppelin-piloting license, irrespective of automatic pitch control! Her two transatlantic exploits in zeppelin (and dirigible) flight earned her a scholarship to the Zeppelin Piloting Academy (offices in Toronto, Lakehurst, and Brisbane), where upon finally mastering pitch control she graduated third in a class of fifty-eight.

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