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Is this excerpt about ABAGNALE'S CHARACTER, HIS SKILLS/ABILITIES, or HIS BACKGROUND LIFE?

Explain why and highlight relevant words, phrases, or sentences that support your answer.

I felt great in my Pan Am pilot's uniform as I walked into La Guardia Airport. I obviously was commanding respect and esteem. Men looked at me admiringly or enviously. Pretty women and girls smiled at me. Airport policemen nodded courteously. Pilots and stewardesses smiled, spoke to me or lifted a hand in greeting as they passed. Every man, woman and child who noticed me seemed warm and friendly.

It was heady stuff and I loved it. In fact, I became instantly addicted. During the next five years the uniform was my alter ego. I used it in the same manner a junkie shoots up on heroin. Whenever I felt lonely, depressed, rejected or doubtful of my own worth, I'd dress up in my

pilot's uniform and seek out a crowd. The uniform bought me respect and dignity. Without it on, at times, I felt useless and dejected. With it on, during such times, I felt like I was wearing Fortunatus' cap and walking in seven-league boots.

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I became hungry. I stepped into one of the airport's many coffee shops, dropped onto a stool at the counter and ordered a sandwich and milk. I was almost finished eating when a TWA co-pilot sat down on a stool eater-cornered from me. He looked at me and nodded. He ordered coffee and a roll, then regarded me with mild curiosity.

"What's Pan Am doing here at La Guardia?" he asked casually. Apparently, Pan Am did not fly out of La Guardia.

"Oh, I just deadheaded in from Frisco on the first flight I could catch," I replied. "I'll catch a chopper to Kennedy."

"What kind of equipment you on?" he asked, biting into his roll.

My brains turned to ice cubes. I nearly freaked out. Equipment? What did he mean, equipment? Engines?

Cockpit instruments? What? I couldn't recall having heard the word before in connection with commercial airlines. I frantically searched for an answer for it was obviously a normal question for him to ask. I mentally reread the reminiscences of the veteran Pan Am captain, a little book I'd really liked and which I'd virtually adopted as a manual. I couldn't recall his ever using the word "equipment."

It had to have some significance, however. The TWA airman was looking at me, awaiting my reply. "General Electric," I said hopefully. It was definitely not the right answer. His eyes went frosty and a guarded look crossed his features. "Oh," he said, the friendliness gone from his voice. He busied himself with his coffee and roll. >

I gulped the rest of my milk and dropped three dollars on the counter, more than ample payment for my snack. I stood up and nodded to the TWA pilot. "So long," I said, and headed for the door.

"Fruzhumtu," he growled. I wasn't sure of his exact words, but they sounded suspiciously like something I couldn't actually do to myself.

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I spent the next few days in the boneyard. In the past I'd found my best sources of information on airlines were airlines themselves, so I started calling the various carriers and pumping their people for information. I represented myself as a college student doing a paper on transportation, as an embryo book author or magazine writer, or as a cub reporter for one of the area's dailies.

Generally I was referred to the airline's public relations department. Airline PR people love to talk about their particular airline, I found. I quickly confirmed my suspicions that my aviation education was strictly elementary, but within a week I had zoomed through high school and was working on my bachelor's degree.

The airline flacks, a lot of whom had been members of aircrews themselves, obligingly filled me in on a wealth of juicy facts and technical tidbits: the types of jets used by both American and foreign carriers, fuel capacities and speeds, altitudes, weight limits, passenger capacities, number of crewmen, weight limits and other such goodies.

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“Those of our pilots who didn’t come to us from the air force or the navy came to us from Embry-Riddle,” said one airline flack pridefully.

I knew nothing about the military. I couldn’t tell a private from a vice admiral. So I awarded myself a scholarship to Embry-Riddle, graduated fantasy cum laude, and then gave myself a few years of mythical experience with Eastern Airlines.

As my knowledge of airlines and airline terminology broadened, my confidence returned. I opened a checking account in the name of Frank Williams, with a post-office box address, and when my order for two hundred personalized checks arrived general delivery, I tried cashing a few checks in my guise as an airline pilot.

It was like going on safari in the Bronx Zoo. Cashiers couldn’t get the money out of the tills fast enough. Most of them didn’t even ask for identification. I shoved my phony ID card and my ersatz pilot’s license in their faces anyway. I didn’t want my handiwork to go unnoticed. The first couple of checks I wrote were good. The others had all the value of bubble-gum wrappers.

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I started hanging around La Guardia regularly, not with any intentions of catching a flight, but to meet airline personnel and to eavesdrop on airline talk. Testing my vocabulary, so to speak. I shunned Kennedy, since Pan Am operated out of there. I was afraid that the first Pan Am pilot I encountered at Kennedy would recognize me as a fraud, court-martial me on the spot and strip me of my wings and buttons.

At La Guardia I made out like a possum in a persimmon tree. Some books *are* judged by their covers, it seems, and in my uniform I was an immediate best seller. I'd walk into a coffee shop, where there would usually be a dozen or more pilots or other crewmen taking a break, and invariably someone would invite me to join him or them. More often it was them, for airline people tend to gaggle like geese. It was the same in cocktail lounges around the airport. I never took a drink in the bars, since I had yet to try alcohol and wasn't sure how it would affect me, but no one questioned my abstinence.

Any pilot, I'd learned, could gracefully decline a drink by pleading the required "twelve hours between the bottle and the throttle." It apparently never occurred to anyone that I'd never seen a throttle. I was always accepted at par value. I wore the uniform of a Pan Am pilot, therefore I must be a Pan Am pilot. Barnum would have loved airline people.

I didn't do a lot of talking initially. I usually let the conversations flow around me, monitoring the words and phrases, and within a short time I was speaking airlinese like a native. La Guardia, for me, was the Berlitz of the air.

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Some of my language books were absolutely gorgeous. I guess the stewardesses just weren't that used to seeing a really young pilot, one that appeared to be an age peer. "Hel-looo!" one would say in passing, putting a pretty move on me, and the invitation in her voice would be unmistakable. I felt I could turn down only so many invitations without seeming to be rude, and I was soon dating several of the girls. I took them to dinner, to the theater, to the ballet, to the symphony, to night clubs and to movies. Also to my place or their place.

I loved them for their minds.

The rest of them was wonderful, too. But for the first time I was more interested in a girl's knowledge of her work than in her body. I didn't object, of course, if the one came with the other. A bedroom can be an excellent classroom.

I was an apt student. I mean, it takes a certain degree of academic concentration to learn all about airline travel-expense procedures, say, when someone is biting you on the shoulder and digging her fingernails into your back. It takes a dedicated pupil to say to a naked lady, "Gee, is this your flight manual? It's a little different from the ones our stewardesses use."

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American's counter was the nearest. I walked over and confronted a ticket clerk who wasn't busy. "Can you cash a \$100 personal check for me?" I asked, checkbook in hand.

"Sure, be glad to," he said, smiling, and took the bouncing beauty with barely a glance at it. He didn't even ask me for identification.

I had occasion to cash checks at airline counters frequently thereafter. I worked La Guardia like a fox on a turkey ranch. The air facility was so immense that the risk of my being caught was minimal. I'd cash a check at the Eastern counter, for instance, then go to another section of the terminal and tap some other airline's till. I was cautious. I never went back to the same counter twice. I worked a condensed version of the scam at Newark, and hit Teterboro a few elastic licks. I was producing rubber faster than a Ceylon planter.

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Mine was a ready-made scam, one for which the airlines, motels and hotels set themselves up. The hotels and motels around metropolitan or international airports considered it just good business, of course, when they entered into agreements with as many airlines as possible

to house transit flight crews. It assured the hostellers of at least a minimum rate of occupancy, and no doubt most of the operators felt the presence of the pilots and stewardesses would attract other travelers seeking lodging. The airlines considered it a desirable arrangement because the carriers were guaranteed room space for their flight crews, even during conventions and other festive affairs when rooms were at a premium. I know from numerous conversations on the subject that the flight crews liked the plan whereby the airlines were billed directly for lodging and allotted meals. It simplified their expense-account bookkeeping.

The deadheading arrangement between airlines everywhere in the world was also a system based on good business practices. It was more than a courtesy. It afforded a maximum of mobility for pilots and co-pilots needed in emergency or essential situations.

However: supervision, auditing, ...

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^{The} deadheading form consisted of an original and two copies. I was given the original as a boarding pass and I gave that to the stewardess in charge of boarding. I knew the operations clerk always called the FAA tower to inform the tower operators that such-and-such flight would have a jump passenger aboard, but I didn't know that a copy of the pink pass was given the FAA. Presumably, the third copy was kept in the operations files of the particular airline. An airline official who made a statement to police concerning my escapades offered what seemed to him a logical explanation:

"You simply don't expect a man in a pilot's uniform, with proper credentials and obvious knowledge of jump procedures, to be an impostor, dammit!"

But I have always suspected that the majority of the jump forms I filled out ended up in the trash, original and both copies.

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There were other factors, too, that weighed the odds in my favor. I was not at first a big operator. I limited the checks I cashed at motels, hotels and airline counters to \$100, and not infrequently I was told there wasn't enough cash on hand to handle a check for more than \$50 or \$75. It always took several days for one of my worthless checks to traverse the clearing-house routes to New York, and by the time the check was returned stamped "insufficient funds," I was a long time gone. The fact that I had a legitimate (on the face of it, at least) account had a bearing on my success also. The bank didn't return my checks with the notation "worthless," "fraudulent" or "forgery." They merely sent them back marked "insufficient funds to cover."

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My adventures. The first few years that's exactly what they were for me, adventures. Adventures in crime, of course, but adventures nonetheless.

I kept a notebook, a surreptitious journal in which I jotted down phrases, technical data, miscellaneous information, names, dates, places, telephone numbers, thoughts and a collection of other data I thought was necessary or might prove helpful.

It was a combination log, textbook, little black book, diary and airline bible, and the longer I operated, the thicker it became with entries. One of the first notations in the notebook is "glide scopes." The term was mentioned on my second deadhead flight and I jotted it down as a reminder to learn what it meant. Glide scopes are runway

approach lights used as landing guides. The journal is crammed with all sorts of trivia that was invaluable to me in my sham role. If you're impersonating a pilot it helps to know things like the fuel consumption of a 707 in flight (2,000 gallons an hour), that planes flying west maintain altitudes at even-numbered levels (20,000 feet, 24,000 feet, etc.) while east-bound planes fly at odd-numbered altitudes (19,000 feet, 27,000 feet, etc.), or that all airports are identified by code (LAX, Los Angeles; JFK or LGA, New York, etc.).

Little things mean a lot to a big phony. The names of every flight crew I met, the type of equipment they flew, their route, their airline and their base went into the book as some of the more useful data.

Like I'd be deadheading on a National flight.

"Where you guys out of?"

"Oh, we're Miami-based."

A sneak look into my notebook, then: "Hey, how's Red doing? One of you's gotta know Red O'Day. How is that Irishman?"

All three knew Red O'Day. "Hey, you know Red, huh?"

"Yeah, I've deadheaded a couple of times with Red. He's a great guy."

Such exchanges reinforced my image as a pilot and usually averted the mild cross-examinations to which I'd been subjected at first.

Just by watching and listening I became adept in other

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car phones were used

I had to improvise a lot. Whenever I'd deadhead into a city not used by Pan Am, such as Dallas, and didn't know which motels or hotels were used by airline crews, I'd simply walk up to the nearest airline ticket counter. "Listen, I'm here to work a charter that's coming in tomorrow. Where do the airlines stay around here?" I'd ask.

I was always supplied with the name or names of a nearby inn or inns. I'd pick one, go there and register, and I was never challenged when I asked that Pan Am be billed for my lodging. All they asked was Pan Am's address in New York.

At intervals I'd hole up in a city for two or three weeks for logistics purposes. I'd open an account in, say, a San Diego bank, or a Houston bank, giving the address of an apartment I'd rented for the occasion (I always rented a pad that could be had on a month-to-month basis), and when my little box of personalized checks arrived, I would pack up and take to the airways again.

I knew I was a hunted man, but I was never sure how closely I was being pursued or who was in the posse those first two years. Any traveling con man occasionally gets the jitters, certain he's about to be collared, and I was no

exception. Whenever I got a case of the whibbies, I'd go to earth like a fox.