

It was a perfect day. The Mage flexed his wing suit and hauled his cloud skis into the small plane. His jump supervisor checked everything, including the emergency parachute packed into his backpack.

The jump supervisor checked the other jumpers then gave the thumbs up to the pilot. The small plane droned down the runway, and took off over the cliffs at the end of the runway. The Mage was used to the take-offs and so were the rest of the jumpers, so the pilot didn't bother with the customary dip over the cliffs at the end of the runway that he used to thrill the tourists.

The Mage chatted with the other jumpers, most of whom he knew. Some were old friends, and others just jump acquaintances. The small plane gradually gained height. He re-checked his gear, as did all the others. It was a reflex.

The pilot climbed to about a few hundred metres above the top of the clouds. The jumpers were all eyeing the cloud scenery and picking out likely cloud stacks, but the jump decisions were made by the jump master.

The Mage was third in the jump list. He waited and watched as the first two jumpers left the plane. The pilot then circled back to look for a good cloud stack, but the Mage was used to the delays and waited patiently in the open hatch. Then the jump supervisor told him to jump.

He exited the plane, then spread his wingsuit to slow his fall. Of course the extended cloud skis made manoeuvring a little difficult. He looked at the cloud scape below him and picked a likely route, but of course that would likely change when he got down there.

Then came the tricky bit. He turned on his cloud skis, and they were enveloped in a blue glow. The Mage stalled his flight and settled momentarily on a cloud peak, then headed downwards on the cloud skis, following a big rift in the cloud. He'd fall straight through the cloud if he stopped for more than an instant.

The feedback from the cloud skis in his earphones was a thrumming noise, which changed pitch as he sped downwards. Part of the skill of the sport was 'reading' the tone of the thrumming as he twisted and turned through the canyons of mist.

The thrumming was related to the moisture density gradient in the cloud. The cloud skis were engineered to push the skier towards the least dense parts of the cloud, but they couldn't completely overrule gravity.

The Mage knew that his time in the cloud was limited. He'd be able to drop maybe half a kilometre before he ran out of cloud. He turned left and right to follow the slopes that would give him the maximum time in the cloud, but the difficulty was that close up, the margins between the cloud and clear air were blurred and distances were hard to judge. As the canyons of cloud started to gather around him he realised that his luck would soon run out.

He made a tight turn, with his skis thrumming loudly in his earphones and saw nothing but a white wall in front of him. He plunged into the white wall, and the cloud swirled around him. If he was very, very lucky, he knew that when he emerged he might be able to continue to ski the cloud at a lower level, but this time he emerged into a clear sky. At least he hadn't just fallen out of the bottom of the cloud.

He clicked off his skis and opened his wing suit, and checked his location. He was north of the jump site, but the terrain sloped to the east. He called in his location as he looked for a touch down point. His skis pivoted on his heels so that they aligned with his body, but they were still ungainly. He flew diagonally across the terrain with his wing suit wide open. Not finding much, he turned one eighty degrees and crossed the slope in the opposite direction, but of course he was now much lower down. He was hoping that he wouldn't have to deploy his emergency parachute.

There was a large gully opening to the east just to the north of his location, so he side slipped until he was headed down the gully and feathered his wing suit so that he landed crosswise on the steep snow slope in the gully. As he touched down his cloud skis clicked back to their usual position,

doubling as snow skis, and he zigzagged down the gully. It was a little steeper than he had expected, with a few drops being necessary, but he managed to handle it with relative ease.

The gully opened out, and he skied over a small drop, landing safely in a wide snow covered field which sloped towards the road. He coasted down the slope until it levelled out. When he came to a halt, he was a hundred metres from the road and called in his position again. He skied to the road and removed his skis. He had to wait twenty minutes or so, but he wasn't worried about the wait. He'd experienced a lot longer in the past.

The pickup vehicle had to pick up two more jumpers, so the Mage chatted with those who had already been picked up about their jumps. They all seemed to have had a good run, and the Mage was happy with his. Traditionally no one had a bad run. They picked up the other two jumpers and headed back to the lodge. The jumpers shared a sip of brandy, as was also the tradition,

When the Mage's party reached the lodge he stored his gear in his locker and went in search of the Boffin. As he guessed she was in the lounge, snoozing in front of the big log fire, her feet up on a footstool. On one side of her was a pile of wool and knitting. On the other side was a pile of books. Spread across her swollen belly was a scientific journal.

She had once confided to him that when she was pregnant she couldn't really concentrate on the journals and textbooks, but felt soothed by them.

He'd just said "Ah-Huh!" in response to her revelation, and was surprised when she gave him a teary hug.

"Oh, I love you so much. I thought that you'd laugh at me."

"My dear," he explained, "you are bag of competing hormones when pregnant. You forget that I'm an expert on moods and feelings, and I'm not surprised that your books and journals soothe you. How many times have I taken your book, book marked it, and put it beside your side of the bed when you have fallen asleep reading it? Your books and journals are so much a part of you."

So he wasn't surprised to find her with the journal on her baby bump. He gently removed it but she woke up.

"Oh, hello dear," she said. "Did you have a good jump?"

"Yes, thanks. The weather was splendid, and the clouds were great. And when I got down to ground level the snow was crisp and great to ski on. I'm going to meet some of the boys in the bar later, unless you want me to stay with you."

She shook her head. "No, I'm going to have a lie down on the bed, but I want a foot rub, if you don't mind."

She started to stand and he helped her up. They gathered up her books and her knitting and slowly made their way to the lift.

"I always feel so huge at this stage," she said. "It's a common feeling."

He helped her up to their room and ensured that she was as comfortable as she could be on the bed. Then he gave her feet a massage, and she dozed off. He made sure that she had her phone close by, and prepared to go and meet his friends.

"See ya later, dear," she said sleepily, "Enjoy yourself."

"I won't be long, my dear," he said, and slipped out of the door.