C6600 CON AIR (USA, 1997)

Credits: director, Simon West; writer, Scott Rosenberg.

Cast: Nicholas Cage, John Cusack, John Malkovich, Ving Rhames, Nick Chinlund, Steve Buscemi, M.C. Gainey.

Summary: Thriller set in the contemporary U.S. Cameron Poe (Cage), an Army Ranger officer, is found guilty of manslaughter after killing a drunk man while protecting his pregnant wife outside a bar, he is sent to jail for eight years. During that time his daughter is born, but he waits patiently in his cell until his parole. He is to be flown home on the “Jailbird,” a converted military C-123. Also on board the plane is a roster of psychotic criminals. There is Cyrus the Virus (John Malkovich), an articulate, thoughtful madman with a penchant for automatic weapons; Diamond Dog (Ving Rhames), a black militant and Cyrus’ trusted lieutenant (or so Cyrus thinks, at any rate); Johnny 23 (Danny Trejo), a serial rapist; Garland Greene (Steve Buscemi), a serial killer in the Hannibal Lecter vein who is treated as the resident prison celebrity; and a good half-dozen other colorful characters in this flying rogues’ gallery. Swamp Thing’ (M.C. Gainey), a Vietnam veteran convicted of flying drugs into the US, is selected by Cyrus to pilot the hijacked plane. Under Cyrus’ direction, the criminals take control of the plane, and it is up to the beleaguered Poe to save the day, with some help from good-guy U.S. Marshal Larkin (Cusack) on the ground, who is seemingly the only person in U.S. law enforcement capable of deciphering Poe’s brief and cryptic messages to the authorities. With Poe’s help, the authorities learn where the convicts are headed and manage to get there before they take off again. But the police and National Guard troops are killed in an ambush at the airfield, the convicts take off again toward Las Vegas and crash land on the Vegas strip. Larkin, with the help of Poe, pursues and kills all but one of the remaining escapes. At the end, Garland Greene, the only fugitive still at large, is seen at a Vegas craps table sipping margaritas.

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