

THE
UTOPIA OF
THE
PLANES



by Tegan Maharaj

I'm shipping out today and my cohort takes off tomorrow. They wouldn't let me delay or defer and I cant pass up the chance, but I feel frantic. I didn't finish this in time. I don't know what will happen to me. If you find this and work out who I am please do not radio me, for both our safety. I don't know if I am too paranoid or not enough. I want to ask that you continue my research, and finish this story, or somehow share and make it known, but I don't know how you could make anyone understand and believe, and I don't know what would happen to you if you could. Something must be done, but how? By whom? I don't know. I know so much and so little, and not what to do with any of it.

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SOME say it starts with an exorbitant private party where they pay the Wright brothers to take potential investors on flying joyrides. Some say it starts with a businessman walking past a jazz band on the street, who asks “*Why don't you play in a concert hall?*”, and the trumpeteer says with a wink and a smile, “*If we give it away, everyone can afford to buy it*”. Some say it starts with a rich, exclusive wives' group who, during their weekly sewing, mutually decide that aeroplanes are dirty, loud monstrosities, to be heavily discouraged to their husbands. Some say it starts with an indulgent radio interviewer and an eager child, after a free county-fair trip up in an aeroplane; that breathless description of yearning to fly across the ocean to see Grandma re-broadcast on radio stations across America for weeks.

Whatever the butterfly's wing that starts it, we know that early in the roaring twenties, a few guys newly rich from the stock market get into aeroplanes.

They buy up huge amounts of manufacturing, and devote it to mass-producing aircraft. They cover the radio and billboards everywhere with advertisements of how amazing the planes are. They say being able to travel everywhere and anywhere will change the world, finally connecting the citizens of Earth to one another, ushering in a new Utopia for humanity. Due to the positively cosmic benefits of this innovation for the world, they say they

cannot in good conscience keep their flights from anyone. They begin running flights between cities and small towns, farmland and coasts, **all for free!**

These upstanding gentlemen are featured on television, radio, and in town halls across America (to which they travel, of course, via aeroplane!). As so many soon find out, the good people of the heartland can now visit far-flung relatives, take a vacation to the sea-side, and be back in time for work on Monday. Children from remote areas can be brought to the best schools. And if you're a smart, hardworking young man who wants to really make a difference, there are a host of wonderful jobs created, from helping build the ever-expanding network of locations accessible by aeroplane, to engineering new and better aircraft. They even guarantee a job for the wife! Seeing their good works, still other upstanding gentlemen pledge huge sums of money in advertising, development, and novel financial instruments to support this newest and greatest revolution – flight, the skies, connection, for all humanity.

In a matter of months, thousands of flight routes are established. There are five or six main companies, or maybe some of them are actually owned by the same men (the corporate records from this time are just a titch confusing and spotty. But of course these great men can be forgiven for stepping over some paperwork in their rush to bring the gift of flight to the world!). In any case, there's just a couple of them really jockeying for dominance and expanding their roster of aeroplanes more rapidly and broadly than any of the others.

These companies run at what traditional economics (mere decades old) would call a loss. But the time of traditional economics is over! The Flightmen, as this small group comes to be called, are rightly hailed as much for corporate innovation as aviation: *“Turning altruism into success” (TM)* – what matters is owning the market and trusting attention of the customers; giving away the goods is simply the price of sale.

Mass ad campaigns continue about the success of the aeroplanes, the wonders of air travel, and (with a wink to let us know it's all friendly competition, for the benefit of all), how much better each company is than each. America has aeroplane fever! Ev-

everyone wants a ride, and in a matter of months, almost everyone has had one. Mere months again later, people begin to rely on the aeroplanes for transit, and become accustomed to quick trips across the pond as the Flightmen begin to offer International routes. Whole cities become adapted before two years pass, with ribbon-cuttings marking deals in front of City Halls, schools, and churches across America.

Whole industries spring up around the routes; tourism, child care, entertainment, and many products to take on board. The most wildly successful of these is a pocket radio (headphones included!) so that everyone can listen to their very own radio on the plane – even the kids get their own, with special children’s programming! Heavily encouraged and subsidized by the Flightmen, simple versions of these are also given out for free. The audio quality is so good, and the experience of listening to your own private radio so enjoyable, that people use them both on and off the plane. A book, a comedy, a soap – whatever strikes your fancy, there’s a radio station for that! No longer is your listening ear chained to whatever the mass broadcasters thought appropriate for you – total freedom, the American way!

New stars rise in the new medium, and new types of entertainment become possible and widespread. The rise of Chatstars and Firsties are particularly meteoric; those who host conversational talk-shows and those who try out and describe new products. These warm and influential figures shine their guiding light through the masses of new connection possibilities and things to acquire – without them we might quickly become lost and overwhelmed! Aiding the consumer revolution is a quieter sister revolution in trustworthy advertising – the Flightmen outspokenly support turn-of-the-century regulation of advertising claims, and their generous financial support ensures governmental agencies have the resources to investigate all claims scientifically.

Some oldsters who still listen to mass-broadcast home radio complain that the radios do not transmit all frequencies, but this is of course necessary in order to offer the revolutionary custom-station technology in such a small package. And the quality of programming on the mass-broadcast goes down so sharply, no right-thinking man would continue to listen. A pocket radio com-

pany begins to give away kits for DIY full-spectrum radios, but a smear campaign reveals they are manufactured in Russia, and successfully convinces consumers that they would broadcast Bolshevik propaganda. The German-manufactured Prockets, with their sleek design and pared-down controls, come to dominate the market. A few complain about the volume of advertisements initially, but hearing about worthy, scientifically tested products is a small price to pay for the seas of free entertainment, and as time goes on the advertisements are customized to fit you! They become so well-tailored that many people want almost everything they're offered, and the next generation of radios feature a dedicated "Order" button. Through commissions on these advertisements and product sales alone, the Flightmens' profits begin steadily climbing, their economic revolution validated.

To help youngsters achieve the same success, they generously offer free training programmes (flight to and from home included, naturally!) for the worthiest applicants. Every six months, a new cohort of Innovators appears on the scene (the "Order" button was one of theirs!), and these young men are hailed as the brightest and best of their generation. The very best of all are offered positions in the Flightmens' companies. To keep the boys focused on the prize, a women's programme is offered separately, and those girls come up with some lovely tweaks to the whole flight experience – the prettier interiors and the new and improved gravy are both thanks to them! In a droll and widely reported incident, a small gaggle of women try to disguise themselves as boys to enter the Innovator cohort, but they are quickly discovered. Given the disruption and headaches it causes to everyone, a firm stop is put to any future attempts.

Another dramatic little story that gets everyone listening begins when a group of inspectors from the board of automobiles attempt to enter a Flightman factory to inspect the planes. In a landmark case, it is established that aeroplanes are not cars, and the automobile industry has no right to regulate the planes. Some people, even some popular Chatstars, wonder about the safety testing of the planes, but the consensus is that they are obviously safe – so many people take them every day, and there hasn't even been one accident, as many of the plane advertisements point out – con-

trast *that* with automobiles, and the failures of the government in regulating their safety! There is also a misguided government attempt to interfere with the planes – with the car case as precedent, and the same charismatic lawyer, it is established that the government has no right to inspect the freely-offered and obviously safe planes beyond the right and lawful scientific validation of advertising claims. The ruling itself is also the focus of an educational mass ad campaign, leading to a series of votes against political interference in safety standards.

Some people do dwell on detour stories – the early planes don't always go where they're supposed to. A popular Chatstar interview someone who says some people estimate this happens up to 20% of the time, but this figure is quickly ridiculed and debunked. And the planes are free, after all. It is churlish to complain about a free service. There's always another plane you can take from where you end up, even if it's a bit inconvenient. It's largely regarded as in poor taste and beside the point of safety to whine about this.

Though it's also regarded as low-brow content, there is talk about the strangeness of the people who work on the planes. They wear a radio device different from the pocket radios; presumably much more advanced, covering the head and eyes. For the most part, passengers get on and off the planes without interference – unlike trains, there's no need to bother you for tickets, and products can be ordered directly via radio, so the experience is made as seamless as possible! There is not much occasion to interact with the plane staff other than the ID checkers. Obviously the pilots are brilliant because the flights are all steady and comfortable, but it's the checkers who sometimes act erratically – jerky little movements, unexplained statements, or seemingly randomly refusing people to board after checking their ID. People speculate that they are failed pilots, resentful of their more successful and admirable colleagues. But these are only rumours, spread on the more gossipy Chatshows. And again, the flights are free, so it's simply not right to complain about being refused a random time or two; you can just get the next one.

In the South, where segregation remains in force, planes must naturally be flown segregated, and with planes going every which

way it just makes sense to run virtually all the routes that way. Negroes who complain are regarded as wholly ungrateful – after all, no one is making them get on these *free* planes, they are a small minority complaining about humanity’s greatest revolution, and they could just start their own flight company if they don’t like the way things are. A popular lady Chatstar reports an analysis by some passengers after taking flights for a month – it shows women are much more often refused than men, and negroes refused almost twice as often, even including black-only flights. A story runs in a newspaper about a colored woman who tries every day for a year to board and is denied every time.

These kinds of stories are derided for masquerading gossip as science, and several of the Innovation Cohort programme graduates found Impartial Audit (IA) companies dedicated to studying the claims scientifically. They release reports on the Flightmen’s policies and refusal rates, in very large studies, and demonstrate that women and Negroes both are a few percentage points more likely to be refused, but that these discrepancies are due to familiar issues, such as a woman not being able to find her ID in her purse, or the Negro not having a valid ID. These creditable IA companies also thoroughly interview aeroplane staff about the reasons for refusal and analyse the interviews with state-of-the-art scientific methods. Their analysis demonstrates that no racism or bias of any kind exists; only a commitment to peaceful, law-abiding, and innovative American principles.

An upstart politician from a working-class town calls for an investigation into the workforce of the plane companies. They are one of the world’s largest employers after only a handful of years, and most people know someone who knows someone who works for the Flightmen or their subsidiaries. But, innovative in this as in all things, the Flightmen hire mostly in clusters: whole towns or graduating classes, so not much talk comes out. The politician claims that the Checkers erratic actions are increasing, that they’re perhaps having seizures, yet are not allowed home to see their families. These claims and the politician’s career are confidently derailed – if any of this were true why is it just one self-interested crusading politician talking about it, and not the families, or the thousands of Checkers themselves?

Meanwhile in continued informational advertisement campaigns, the Flightmen declaim confidently that safety is their most important concern, and it can't be trusted to uninformed governments or third party regulators to insure. A small safety innovation fee, a percentage of each product sale, is introduced to demonstrate their commitment to customer safety. They fight several more lawsuits to protect their trade secrets, including the training of the pilots and all other staff, and the clearly-exemplary safety technology itself. Overall, their heroic innovation in the face of such petty and captious opposition is lauded for beginning our much-deserved Utopian revolution.

By this time most children in America go to school via plane. Cars and buses exist but many have been dismantled to use as parts in the planes, and several cases are won which establish that grounding planes unnecessarily is unacceptably disruptive to the lives of children. Those children of families too frequently rejected from planes must attend special schools accessible only by car. These schools do poorly in the rankings, reinforcing what everyone already knew; that the plane companies were right to keep those inferior people out of the good schools. There is some limited controversy over this, but most people agree that the world is too divided and full of drama as it is.

With plane safety assured and international travel normalized, emphasis is more correctly put on customers' safety in other countries. Several of the Cohort businesses focus on ensuring a seamless international experience around the travel hubs, called Havens, with local tours and extensive development and support of local tourism industries. Cities and whole countries vie internationally to be the next Haven, and the Flightmen do their utmost to ensure the Haven network remain safe. Locations thus shut out of the network are known to be savage, backward, and dangerous.

Further scientific advances made by the men of genius in the flight companies continue to be advertised, for example in fixing the bias against women. A subsequent analysis by the ladies' groups finds it improved by only a small margin, but their analyses always lag behind by several months because they are sourced from unreliable passenger data, and their statistical methods are

woefully behind the times. Charitably, the Flightmen still advertise their and others' critical claims, together with the scientific explanations of their invalidity. Talk of statistics in the news can be confusing and contradictory, and there is initially little public understanding. But again the Innovation cohorts come to the rescue, creating the excellent public education materials that have revolutionized scientific understanding in America.

A few events occur in the next years which might incorrectly be viewed as marks on the face of the Utopia of the Planes. In fact they serve only to high-light by contrast the brightness, gaiety, and resplendent *accomplishment* of those golden years with their grimy, sordid smallness. I mention them here only to make this apparent, to the reader and to the annals of history.

A man claiming to be an engineer and former pilot travels to street corners and any Chatshow that will have him, spouting conspiracy theories about the Flightmens' training regime. These include implausibly convoluted stories about drugs and brain-washing, and even claims that the pilots are not fully human. His is the first of the Falsification trials, which to their credit the Flightmen broadcast in their entirety. It comes out during the trials that most of the initial workforce were former prisoners and Military veterans, bought from the penitentiaries and reformed. The Flightmen say they are proud of supporting a second chance for everyone, and indeed all reports show that crime rates are falling faster than any other time in history. Much scientific analysis of this benediction is performed, and it is concluded as owed to the abundance of gainful employment, benefits on the psyche of racial segregation, and the longed-for unified world society of the Havens.

The second Falsification trial is of a scientist working for a nuclear research group, who joined the ex-pilot on street corners and Chatshows even after his discrediting. This supposed scientist claims his working group has determined that, contrary to the Flightmens' published accounts of the plane technology, the plane engines use an unsafe and under-tested nuclear core, which could explode and ignite the atmosphere.

Some meetings are organized by University professors, bitter to be left behind while their more qualified colleagues leave for mean-

ingful work at the plane companies. They call themselves the Scientific Society, and make renewed claims for safety investigations and public recording of incidents in a desperate bid to remain relevant. The Flightmen obligingly make some reports for them, and the Society loudly proclaims its success. Some Ladies' groups attempt to join the Society, trumpeting their own findings that the numbers in the reports are not consistent, even suggesting they might be forged. But they are rightly dismissed from the Society for unscientific gossip; one of the Ladies escapes Falsification trial only due to the good reputation of her husband.

There is a joint publication from the Scientific Society and colleagues of the nuclear research group Falsie, showing that the planes' flight is too steady and comfortable to be the result of a conventional combustion engine, and speculating how such steadiness could be achieved with a nuclear engine (in a stroke of irony, they do not publish the design of the nuclear engine out of claimed safety concerns). The IA and other truly scientific agencies again patiently explain the absurdity of putting a nuclear engine in a plane, and note the planes' impeccable safety record and the importance of trade secrets to free markets.

A faction of the Ladies group make wild claims about Coloreds and Negroes being murdered after being detoured on planes; their leader is the first and only Lady Falsie, in the shortest and least interesting trial. A group of theater actors disappears after getting on a plane, causing a hubbub on the Chatshows as they miss their Broadway showing. It comes out that they were almost certainly in fact fleeing justice for their immoral homosexual behaviour, of which they now repent, and it is a kindness of the public to spare them the embarrassment of further celebrity. A doomsday cult calling themselves the Heaven Planers gets a lot of coverage and Chat-Time after three full planes commit a synchronized mass suicide. The only small but significant condolence for this horrible tragedy is the increased safety monitoring of the Prockets, marking the final stage of crime dissolution and enabling the deep sense of security we now all able to take for granted today.

The Trusted Consortium Ladies Research Group emphasize that they do not seek to ban the planes (as several nutjobs and Falsies have), only to ensure equal access of women and to allow women

to participate in the safety inspections. They conduct studies on the planes, finding no evidence of nuclear residues, and make public statements discrediting the Scientific Society and Nuclear Research Group. The lead nuclear scientist says women are biologically incapable of rational scientific inquiry, and joins an anti-suffrage group as their main spokesperson. Educational advertisements and general consensus agree with the women that the nuclear scientists are off-base, and with the scientists that the women are unfit to assess safety.

In a secretly-broadcast Chatshow, one of the Flightman CEOs says he does not know how the plane engines work anymore, or if they are nuclear. He says all the pilots are trained under a programme he doesn't have any control over, and all the pilots are trained together with other plane companies' in secret locations. He has seen large shipments from pharmaceutical companies bound for to their offices, but he has not been allowed to visit. His attempts to find out more about the training procedures were rebuffed. He is worried. The Chatstar who broadcast the conversation is the subject of the fifth trial, and is revealed to be part of a Bolshevik conspiracy from a fledgling Russian flight company. Although it is unable to be proven in court to the high standards of Falsification, it is widely known that the CEO was drugged and flying high during the interview, inventing stories based in fear rather than facts.

All Prockets simultaneously broadcast a fuzzy signal, with faint but clear screaming and laughter in the background, and an eventual mumbling monotone "Is it... is it... are ... are you there, am I ... do you hear me? Help. Help me. Help us. Please, hel-" abruptly cut off by a scream, followed by silence for 10 seconds. This disturbing stunt is followed by the warm, reassuring voice of one of the main Flightmen, apologizing for the egregious intrusion into their peaceful enjoyment. A relatively new recruit was testing a broadcast feature, and regrettably played a segment of a Gothic horror-play not intended for wide distribution due to its spooky content. The recruit is brought on and gives a wobbly, tearful apology. The Flightman assures listeners the broadcast feature will be discontinued.

Plane credits become the main global currency used on a daily

basis, and the plane companies the richest in the world. The seventh Falsification trial is of a Swiss banker, who claims the large sums accrued from safety fees are being deposited in a very strange manner, across bank accounts that are created and closed at odd hours by pilots, with the money ultimately not remaining in any Haven bank accounts. It is demonstrated that the shady business practices were in fact an elaborate money-laundering scheme orchestrated by a large organized crime syndicate. It is made a crime to impersonate a pilot or other qualified scientific expert. The banker is the first Falsie to be exonerated, due to his honest misunderstanding of the facts, and becomes a vociferous supporter of the Flightmen's responsible business practices. Sadly, an enormous amount of money remains missing, but this does not affect the high standard of living of our fledgling Utopia.

In a bombshell interview, the head engineer of the most prominent Flightman company makes the first public affirmation, under oath, that the plane engines are not nuclear. Questioned by an enthusiastic and optimistic-sounding reporter, the engineer sounds jumpy and exhausted, one sentence halting and cautious-sounding to the point of paranoia, and the next tumbling out in a single breath. The engineer mumbles something that includes the word "distraction". "Who is causing a distraction? What are they trying to distract from?" the reporter asks. Prolonged silence. "So what can you tell us about the real technology?" The former engineer starts several sentences, with halting and unsure sounds, and then falls silent. "Are there any risks to whatever the real technology is?" The engineer unexpectedly breaks into sobs. "I can't, I can't" he says.

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Three photographs inside a factory-looking room showing hundreds of operations being performed on what appear to be live humans, their heads encased in a box with a television directly opposite their faces. All look ecstatically happy.

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15 clipped together news articles from all over the US, of different large-scale purchases of land, water rights, and drilling rights.

Some of the companies are recognizably Flightmen-affiliated, but others there is no obvious link or reason for their inclusion.

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9 photographs clipped together with a note that says "Negroe extermination", starting out with a road and some dusty school- or government-looking buildings, then a nondescript fence, and then several of one or more mass graves. All the visible faces and body parts appear to have dark shiny skin.

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Meeting with Robert Croyer:

It's the only way I could talk about it. To get around... (gesticulates & grabs head, looks pained.) Everyone thinks I'm crazy. I think I'm crazy, they made me crazy. But I'm not stupid. Not ... mentally absent, or morally bankrupt, or wrong about the basic facts.

They're not in control anymore.

No one is in control.

There was a plan, so many plans, we thought... they thought... But it's all beyond us now. It's a monstrous thing, truly, a monster with no face, or a thousand faces. The planes and the training and the economics and the advertising and the brainwashing and the money and the trials... all of it, just all of it. It's all connected, it's all the (strangled sound) sys-, system. We don't even know what it is anymore, what it's doing, what it's doing to us, what will it do, to us. And no one believes me. I sound crazy, I know, and how could a crazy person be right about anything? How could anyone listen to me?"

(Cries quietly. I hugged him. And retreated to these notes. I don't know what to say)

(Told him I believe him. He nodded. Maybe tried to smile? Didn't stop crying)

Hi Professor,

This is everything I've found so far, and unfortunately I'm pretty confident it's comprehensive, at least for this library. I think I said some pages were from a book, but I think actually I was wrong and it's just a few different typewriters/kinds of paper (did you know you can take out typewriters at the library? I did some tests.) There were also some handwritten notes; I put those in italics as near as I could to where I found them.

Have you had a chance to talk to the colleague you mentioned about co-supervision? I really appreciate your support pursuing this, it started out as just a fun side project, but now I'm getting pretty interested – I don't want to get ahead of the evidence but I believe this has the potential to be one of the most complete Falsification records ever found.

The tone is strange, and I don't really know where to start evidencing which parts are fiction, or individual hallucination, or intentional muckraker junk, or what... I'm really not sure about how to go about checking a lot of the details, and this is probably where I need the most guidance – E.g. I've never seen a negro so I don't know if they really looked like that or it could just be some kind of old-fashioned photo doctoring.

My main theories are (1) the first note is genuine, from a mentally ill early recruit, and it was found and embellished into a muckraker draft and then abandoned and hidden, or (2) it's some kind of secret modern art project or Falsification all the way through. Do those seem like the main possibilities to you? (2) would be disappointing, but still creditable, and it seems the more likely ... accurate dating could help a lot, do you know anything about doing that? Do you know how many Falsie docs have been credited, or how to find out? Do you have access to recruit records from the early days, or would the colleague you mentioned?

In any case, it does seem possible there may be other earlier or later drafts, maybe even other supporting materials like the pictures and articles elsewhere. I am eager to check other libraries; any ideas where to start?

Looking forward to working with you,

Adias