

THERE are many who view air travel as a stressful experience. Interestingly enough however, their reasons for doing so can vary hugely. For example, you have the common or garden variety of person who is simply terrified of flying. Absurd, you say? Think about this carefully: 300 people are suspended in the air in an immensely heavy metallic craft in a way that seems to defy familiar concepts such as gravity. While in no way attempting to denigrate the marvels of modern technology, it is perhaps not that strange that some people retain a primitive scepticism towards the

down!

Another friend described an incident on a flight to Calcutta, where a novice passenger apparently decided to see what would happen if he turned the handle of the emergency exit! Narrowly avoiding explosive decompression, whereby all the passengers could have experienced flying in quite a different way (i.e., freefall) by being sucked out of the cabin door, the valiant stewards managed to prevent the door from opening properly. However, somehow they were unable to close the door again firmly enough, so that two people held on to the door for the rest of the flight, while a third kept a sharp eye on the nutjob passenger, who couldn't understand why everyone was so upset over what, after all, was an honest mistake...

But if the cabin crew acquitted themselves with valour on that occasion, I regret to say that I must put forward a new reason to dread flying: mad cabin staff. It is perhaps an oversimplifica-

Fear of Flying

safety of taking to the skies...

Of course, in some cases, people have more rational reasons to dislike air travel. They think that the engine is making a strange sound, or that there are sparks coming out of the engines i.e., that the tenor of the flight has changed in some way. Indeed, the boffins at Heathrow airport have made a fortune out of a course which costs a pretty penny, but is apparently highly effective in persuading people how an aircraft might actually sound when it is in trouble, as opposed to how it sounds when we just think it's in trouble. Apparently the course has a very high rate of success in curing anxious travellers of their fears. Now of course, they just have to make sure that they don't hear any scary noises that they actually recognise!

Others have even more well-founded cause for fear. A colleague of mine remembers an incident many years ago - which he now regularly recounts to great laughter from an appreciative audience who are particularly glad that they weren't there at the time. Apparently, he had the misfortune of being on a smaller aircraft with a high proportion of both Bangladeshis and Pakistanis travelling on a particular flight. Some foolish altercation between two passengers of different nationalities quickly developed into a skirmish between the two groups, leading the aircraft to pitch wildly from one side to another in mid-air, while the hapless cabin staff (and the minority of sane passengers) shrieked at everyone to calm down - and more importantly, sit

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tion to use the term "mad", since many of these individuals are not clinically insane, but merely suffer from borderline personality disorders (a condition, alas, far more widespread in society than we might like to believe). In the context of this article therefore, the term mad is used to cover a multitude of sins, and simply denotes a degree of bizarre or inexplicable behaviour.

In recent years, I have several times either directly experienced, or been a fascinated observer of such behaviour on the part of various airline crew members. In fairness, I must say that the airline least inclined to such behaviour (and I beg them not to take this statement as a challenge that they must disprove) is probably Emirates.

While fully acknowledging that airline passengers can be demanding and unreasonable, particularly when so many of them are packed into a small space, I believe that working in a service industry, unfortunately means that you have to provide service (not to