



flight path



by **Symon Brando**

“So, this is how it happened...”

I’m on a flight back to Melbourne and it’s late; London, 18 hours in the past. Sky is black but diamond-stars clearly visible. Dullards with no imagination hate long plane flights. Not me— it’s the closest I’ll ever get to floating in space.

Old-time astronomers were so freaked at the lack of landmass on gas giants like Jupiter and Saturn that they invented bizarre aliens to populate the swirling clouds and raging storms of those failed stars. It was inconceivable to the humanist mind that barren energy could exist, devoid of life of any sort.

I remember those ancient astronomical images glimpsed as a child, artists’ renditions, from yellowed copies of *Time-Life*. They come to me now as I press against this tiny window: hovering, billowing puff-balls with huge, goggly eyes. Bared razor-sharp teeth. And most scary of all, their enormous mouths, air-intakes for the wretched creatures, sucking in the methane-poison of Jupiter, to be farted out the back, propelling their pulpy bulk through that hell-world.

A third-gen, poor-res video flickers to life on the screen at the head of the middle aisle: starring Big Arnie. Jupiter puff-balls fade from view. The film passes harmlessly enough, and I actually prefer to watch it without my earphones. Arnie’s Germanic vowel construction makes it easy to lip-read, his Teutonic jaws threshing like massive tectonic plates, grind and flow, grind and flow— tranquility.

Soundless, his women reduce to a collection of body-parts, a sex-kit to be put together at my leisure; of course I have trouble fitting the legs right.

After the Arnie, I settle down as the stewardess lovingly dims the lights. But I’m too excited for sleep. Thank Christ I got a window seat this time! And it’s forward of the wing so no obstructions to my view. There’s an empty seat next to me and the one next to that? Occupied by a Very Large Bloke.

I peer into the night, dimly aware that every other passenger seems to be fast asleep, so soon after the film ended. It’s 9 pm London time, and the plane is so eerie quiet. Reminds me of a dream I once had. Or *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*— who’s a pod, who’s human? I look out and down, thinking of the grounded masses, unaware of this lumbering hunk of metal slicing the air above. Terrestrial time and space haemorrhages uncontrollably— up here, we’re so far out we’re in, back in our minds again.

I spot a large building —like a city hall— illuminated so far down on the ground. Incredibly, its minute features are clearly outlined in a phosphorescent glow. “It’s the middle of the night,” I mutter, hazily. Then I notice: the bloody thing is not lit from the inside but alight from aloft. Frightened, I’m fascinated and pleasantly bemused, all at once.

I rub my eyes and open them to see the roof of the building now bathed in a white light...

I watch the lozenge of light switch sharply along a 90-degree axis; this time a massive area is targeted. Houses and streets comprising a huge

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MR SNOW

**I rub my eyes. They're wet.
I'm sobbing uncontrollably. I open
them, look out at the window, and
stare into the most intense bright
light I have ever seen.**

rectangular grid light up under the intense gaze of this white beam. Tears roll down my cheeks. I'm fucken scared, no mistake. What is it? As swift as lightning, the beam shoots straight ahead revealing trees massed together as in a forest, all the while darting forwards, sideways, and all points in-between. It's as if something is mapping the countries below.

Now the light flashes backwards, I can't see it, where is it?! No. No!!! I'm too close, I got a glimpse, saw through the veil. Show me more!

Please...

I crane my head to look downwards and there it is, angling underneath the plane, steady as we go. The light snaps back to repeat the previous manoeuvres. So swift: "click-click-click."

It's been about half an hour since I first noticed the light but now it suddenly winks out, as if being switched off; I strain and strain to look up and out, there's stars but there's nothing of any... wait. Wait. A ball, of orange, tiny— a star? Jupiter? It snuffs out. And now there's three of them, those balls, and now they're bigger and they're green, triangular formation. And now they're gone.

I rub my eyes. They're wet. I'm sobbing uncontrollably. I open them, look out at the window, and stare into the most intense bright light I have ever seen. It engulfs me, like an electric blanket—it's physical—and I cannot see *anything* except this white heat: not my hands in front of my face, or my body, or the plane's interior, or any other passengers or even the night sky.

Nothing.

Now my head hurts, terribly. I try to sleep, then instinctively check my watch: 2:15 am, London time. *Five hours have passed since I first saw that light!* But it felt like half an hour... I feel paralysed, comatose, cabbaged. *That's fucking impossible— could only have been an hour, tops.* I'm missing time. *Me!*

I look around. They're all still asleep! Dead to the

world! Eyes rolled back into their lids as if their power supply had shut down. I'm crazy, then, who the fuck is gonna believe this? No-one saw with my eyes and I'm not about to try and explain it to the snoring, whiskey-smelling behemoth one seat down from me.

I mull over what I've seen. That light paced us for five hours! It appeared to come from the heavens, as far as I could make out from the tiny window, thousands and thousands of feet above. Yet there was no beam or visible rays directing it, just those huge rectangles of illumination darting in all directions.

And then those crazy orange-green balls of light, high above.

3:15 am, London time. I fix upon the calm pink dawn, still stunned. I haven't moved a muscle since... Suddenly I snap to attention, like vibrations from a furiously-strummed rubber band. My entire being super-charges, better than any cheap pills, was it from that crystalline light?! I'm more alive than I've ever been! The rubber band, my self, decays to rest and I snort a short burst of nihilistic passivity, the warm afterglow.

But that's over, because— oh! oh!— here we go again! I... can... see... clearly... now! The light, the light, show me the way! I'm gonna take on the world, yeh! Plot and plan and pull off my own personal revolution! Thoughts programmed into my head— or are they mine? Oh my bloody God! Oh my gosh! Intense, man! Mother... I've patched into some kind of global mixing desk, I'm re-wiring it... Man! Pulsing down cables and fibre optics, fuck! Skirting high-tension rims and higher-tensile steel! Plugged into the National Grid, oh...

My whole body vibrating with pleasure and goodwill. That light— *it's in my head!* Clear light, brilliant beam, pure, pure. So pure... The triangle of coloured balls— *burning my retina!*

I come in my jeans, an involuntary orgasm. The tang of punk wafts up. I come again. And again. And again and again and again. Oh, God... I'm writhing in my seat, hoping no one wakes up. What IS happening? My hand is nowhere near my dick, but I just had multiple orgasms! Men can't do that...can they?! Oh, God, not again...yes, yes, YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Now I don't give a fuck who sees what. I go to loosen my belt...and I snap out of it. I see that my jeans are already down to my ankles, my cock free— stiff as a board and sticky as jelly! Now how did that happen?

The Very Large Bloke from the seat-but-one next to me removes his hand from my dick. He lowers his flabby mouth and slurps the sperm from my balls.

I do a double-take. Take the scene in. Politely yet firmly ask him what the hell he thinks he's doing.

Apparently, he'd been giving me a hand-job while I told him the tale of the lights.

"Th...that's s-some story, k-kid" he stutters in a squeaky, poncey voice, wiping his mouth of jism. I see the malice and doubt etched large upon his dial, filling my gills with a righteous, pompous fury that seems utterly at home at this moment. My sexual molestation is soon forgotten— I have bigger fish to fry:

"Oh, so you don't believe any of this? You accuse *me* of using artifice and cliché to weave a tale? But of course, *you* require the naked word and place no faith in half-truths!" I pick up his copy of *American Psycho* and slap his face with it. And then I do up my pants.

Only then do I continue.

"You desire bloody realism and a 'snuff' aesthetic to restore your faith in art you can never create and will never have a hand in. But the tools are there, always have been— you insist on quill and blood, yet tune into one-way State Radio. Loopback failure! You map and navigate and suffer the illusion of choice, but the blood is on *your* hands at the end of every trail. Cul-de-sac crime! Pick yourself up and listen, fat boy..."

He cowers with fear at my feet, kissing them to appease me.

I kick him away, effecting a whiny tone not unlike his own: "I haaaate mythelf and I want to dieeee."

The sharpest edge steels my voice.

"Oh, *that's* all been done before..."

The 747 touches down at Melbourne Airport. They find some freak strapped to the forward landing gear; he's half-frozen to death and they rush him to hospital in a critical condition.

Something to tell your kids. If you have any.

The Very Large Bloke slips three hundred-dollar bills into my hand, and thanks me for initiating him into the Mile-High Club. Then the wanker rushes off to greet his wife. Mummy and Daddy appear and kiss me on the cheek... and I take a step back. I can't believe someone so close to me could look so utterly inhuman! It's in their faces, like, like their faces been pulled through a mirror or something. Reversed. I gotta get some sleep.

Melbourne's changed since I left. The buildings seem insubstantial, as if superimposed onto... I'm



not sure what; a diorama from the dawn of time.

It's a ghost town, everyone's so pale, or green like the classic zombie. *The light's different.* The sky seems to glow fluoro-purple every twilight. It's disorientating. I can see particles, molecules in the air. The air's thick, like soup. I wave my hand about and the air ripples.

Urban futurism.

Days later.

I ring a 'UFO Hotline', listed in the telephone directory. I ring it, ring-ring-ring, and I'm soon in contact with a man with a grating hick accent. He's from Narre-fucken-Warren. Psychoville. Abduction territory. Great.

He tells me he's from the 'International Peace Project'— *the IPP*, he mouths the initials, as if they're of the gravest import. He tells me his holographic theory of the universe, of fragments reflecting the whole. And how holographs need maintenance, tinkering with, every now and then. I tell him of the plane flight and the beam of light and The Very Large Bloke and how I was completely unaware of his slobbering attentions, the source of my very great pleasure. I tell him of the three scars that have appeared since I landed, at the base of my spine like incisions, arranged in a triangle.

"Aliens?" I timidly venture.

He tells me alien hypotheses are mostly bullshit; that I got a questing mind which leaves a person vulnerable if they're not careful— "You can leave holes in your aura if you're careless"— and that I let unscrupulous witches, black magicians, bore holes into my being.

"That's what happened on the plane," he says.

"Your fellow passengers. Probably a travelling coven, with the fat guy as ringleader." The man from the IPP

scares me shitless.

"But," I splutter. "It wasn't too bad... I loved it!"

"Yes, your flesh is weak" he replies, his voice cracking with age.

And then he tells me he's received reports of this nature before.

"However," he bangs on, "you're the first to observe them from above, from the air. Them other reports wuz ground-based!" He bamboozles me for an hour, and I forget I'm being charged at the rate of three dollars per minute. Finally, he tells me, he'll put me in contact with an 'official', who'll send me the latest IPP newsletter.

Three months later.

I have not heard from the 'official', and I am bereft of the IPP newsletter but in possession of a stupendous phone bill.

Peace costs, let that be a lesson to us all.

Now I sit on my porch and think, withdrawn into my skull; people pass me by, wondering what has happened to the boy who had the world at his feet. But I can never explain, how could I? I can't prove I was overseas, there's no photos, no proof at all. How can I quantify the vision that came to me?

That's the rationalist's dilemma: reality is far too complex for regular transmission. How to represent it? Legend...

Legend gives it another shape, allowing it to travel around the world.

Let there be more light. ■