

Fred Handles an Emergency

Not because he paid extra for it, because Fred didn't believe in paying extra for anything, but because the seat was unsold and the flight attendant took pity on Fred's long spindly legs crammed into a regular seat space. So that's how Fred, the World's Worst Tourist, found himself ensconced in the roomier Emergency Exit aisle, right next to the Emergency Exit door.

Rachel, miffed because her petite legs kept her in a regular seat, thought the flight attendant deserved whatever she got by putting Fred in a position of responsibility. Then she thought of how pleasant the flight would be without her perpetually-complaining husband next to her for five hours, and a feeling of goodwill towards flight attendants suffused her.

As the final passengers fumbled towards their seats and the plane prepared to depart, the flight attendant instructed Fred and his two seatmates in the Emergency Exit row, about their required actions should an emergency transpire. It involved lifting a big handle on the Emergency door and pushing it open.

Three bobbleheads all nodded their understanding.

The flight attendant moved away, not knowing that Fred had a big problem with instructions. For example, when briefed on the new ultra-security procedures to access the restricted area at the government agency that had the misfortune of employing him, Fred misunderstood the retinal scan instructions. He caused quite an incident when he approached the wall-mounted scanner for the first time, turned, dropped his trousers, and presented his bare backside to the device.

He thought they said rectal scan. Two file clerks, who had been standing nearby, are still in therapy, at taxpayers' expense.

As the plane door closed and the powerful engines spooled up, Fred stared at the Emergency door that had been placed in his care. He wondered how often the release mechanism was tested,

to verify that it operated the way it should.

He consoled himself that it was probably tested on a regular basis. But still ...

Exactly how frequently? And was the tester competent, or careless because of years of repetitive testing?

The plane was pushed back from the terminal.

In a real emergency, it would be catastrophic if the door didn't open. Many would die. Especially him.

So wouldn't he be doing everyone a tremendous favour if he tested the device himself, right now, before something awful happened, like a fire, or skidding off the runway, or running out of complimentary pretzels?

The plane slowly started taxiing towards the runway.

Dammit, it was his *duty* to test this door! All their *lives* depended on it!

Before anybody could react, Fred unbuckled his seatbelt, lurched forward, grabbed the door handle, lifted and pushed.

The door performed exactly as engineered, propelling itself away from the plane while automatically deploying the bright yellow slide ramp. Fred sat back in his seat and marvelled at it all, as screams and shouts filled the cabin and the pilot jammed on the brakes, causing everyone to jerk forward hard against their belts.

Except Fred, who wasn't wearing his belt. He whacked his head hard into the seatback in front of him.

Highly-trained airport security boarded the plane and hustled a dazed, incoherent Fred (babbling "Well, at least you know it works!") away, not because they considered him a terrorist, but to protect him from hundreds of irate passengers whose travel schedules just got shot to hell.

Rachel was one of those irate passengers, and she was particularly pleased that, of the fusillade of flotsam flung at Fred, her full water bottle hit him square in the back.

For myself, I may only practice emergency procedures under strict supervision.