

THOUGHTPIECE 12

A View from the Right Revelations of a frequent flyer.

You may have noticed that when you board a long haul flight, there are those who habitually turn left; we call them "left hookers", and those who turn right – the "right hookers".

A left hooker believes that a 747 has about 40 seats, that seats are indeed beds and that all flights start with a free glass of champagne and a hot towel.

Right hookers on the other hand know that a 747 actually seats many hundreds of people, that all babies are right hookers, and we sit at the back of the bus in what some left hookers dismissively call "cattle class" and we prefer to call the "crumple zone".

As a right hooker who has done more flying miles than is healthy this year I used to envy the left hookers, but over time I have come to enjoy the subtle pleasures of right hooking.

I have now decided that the life of a left hooker must actually be fundamentally boring, indeed so boring that they have to be given beds not seats in the hope that they will quietly sleep all day and not cause any problems. It is a bit like an old people's home in the sky!

Think of the extra pleasures that we left hookers have on offer:

Online Check-In – the left hooker (so I am told) can select their seat on the day that they book the flight but as a right hooker I have the joy of uncertainty. Exactly 24 hours before take off; you log in to the airline system to check-in and know that you have a 120-1 chance of "winning" one of the two seats that are actually bearable on a flight that is any longer than 13 minutes.

At the Airport Check-In – when you arrive at the airport, you never quite know if you will get the seat that you reserved or maybe, just maybe, you will be upgraded to Traveller Plus/Premium Economy or even on a good day, the old people's home. You see left hookers never get that buzz of excitement; they just get what they expected in the first place.

Getting onto the flight – now for a right hooker this is an art form in itself. You have to time your approach to the gate carefully. You don't want to sit there for too long, nor indeed do you want to join the queue that forms when two over excited students stand up because a member of the airline staff looks up from the desk 20 minutes before anything is going to happen. Preferably you approach the gate, just as the last of the left hookers has made their way from the "lounge" (whatever that may be), so that you can go through their side of the gate and beat the rest of the right hookers onto the plane. This is important because you need to get space in the overhead bins before the person with the cabin truck, three rucksacks and 15 bags of shopping gets on board, having blagged their way past all airline representatives who mentioned hand baggage restrictions. Left hookers just wander on and miss all of this fun.

The food – you see both left and right hookers get a theoretical choice of chicken or beef. The food is identical, it is just that left hookers have it taken out of the little plastic tray and placed on a plate for them (HMM just like at the old people's home). The difference is that as a right hooker you never quite know if the supplies of chicken will last until it is your turn.

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The booze – basically there is no difference, except left hookers get wine from proper bottles but since wine and taste buds do not operate at 35,000 feet, what is the point? On US based airlines however they obviously believe that right hookers cannot be trusted with alcohol, and charge exorbitant sums for a Gin and Tonic, presumably in the belief that we have spent our life savings on the flight and will not be able to buy enough booze to get disruptive.

Getting off and collecting baggage – OK I agree the left hookers win on this one but the poor old dears need to be rushed off and sorted out quickly, after all they can't survive too long out of bed!

And finally.....the well concealed truth, which must never be told to left hookers!

.....**Behind those curtains it is party time! We get live music, we push the seats to one side for dancing, there is always a poker school and we have even learnt to smile at each other.....**

I don't mind the occasional trip to the old people's home but I will get there soon enough.

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