

ALL HAIL THE PLUMBER OF THE SKY

AS TOLD BY THE WORLD'S MOST
LUMINOUS PLUMBER HIMSELF

There was an in-flight problem with one of the plane's rear toilets. A flight attendant came across the intercom and said, *'Is there a plumber on board?'*

A man came forward and was turned away at once.

'No,' the flight attendant said. *'We need a plumber, not a drummer.'*

The plane's audio equipment was subpar. Everything crackled and was hardly intelligible. The flight attendant dropped her microphone, cupped her hands around her mouth and called out down the aisle, this time with words that were as clear as they were frantic:

'WE NEED A PLUMBER, NOW!'

Pilgrim Airlines Flight 6785 was cruising at an

altitude of 31,000 feet at a speed not too far beneath the sound barrier. The flight was statistically loaded with Medical Doctors. Priority seating was filled to maximum capacity with a group of surgeons who were heading to Houston for a non-work-related PGA event. There were two babies on board, four flight attendants, a man so tall he bought two seats and sat sideways, a homeless man, several men and women who were dressed in formal attire, tourists, an emotional support Labrador Retriever, a college volleyball team, a magician and even a famous mathematician — *BUT THERE WERE NO PLUMBERS!*

Upon boarding the plane, I had seen a little boy playing in the cockpit. He was pushing buttons. Lots of them. Like he was in a video arcade. This concerned me. My view of the rest of the cockpit had been obscured to such extent that I could not confirm if he was under pilot supervision or not. I assumed he was. Though the little boy was wearing a Boy Scout uniform, he, to me at least, looked like a future criminal.

'PLEASE, IF THERE IS A PLUMBER ON BOARD, YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED IMMEDIATELY!'

At that point in my life, I had never plumbed before. Not one single pipe. I had always called a plumber. Whenever anyone asked me that terrible question, 'What do you do?' I would reply, evasively, that I was an *independent contractor*. And sometimes, if I could intuit that the person asking was an independent contractor themselves, I would say, with

extreme vagueness, that I was a *consultant*. In truth, I had no functional purpose to serve in the superorganism of my community, or what the French call *métier*. In other words: Me, a plumber? No. Perhaps one of those doctors in First Class was a specialist in gastroenterology. That was probably the closest thing to a plumber that we had on board this flight.

Which, at present, was undergoing severe turbulence.

I scanned the aisle to see if there was anyone who contained at least the profile or disposition of a plumber; someone around whom we could rally our support. I wondered if the rear lavatory's technical malfunction was in any way interfering with the safety of our flight. Were we going down?

All four members of the cabin crew were making very worrisome gestures to one another. Their expressions were *GRIM* and were conveying that all was *NOT OKAY*. They were whispering confidential updates into one another's ears, then stepping back and shaking their heads and pursing their lips as if to signal that they had *NO CLUE* what to do about the plane's rear toilet.

One of the pilots then came across the intercom and made an announcement that was completely unintelligible. Soon after, the plane plunged a good six thousand feet. Sheer horror. Bedlam. Shrieks. When the plane at last gripped the sky again, the main cabin became distressingly silent. I would have preferred it if all on board were screaming.

Before my flight, I had seen a man running through the terminal at Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport. He was about forty. His running form needed professional attention. As he approached his gate, I saw, before him, that his flight had already departed. The plane was no longer hooked up to the Jetbridge. When he realized this, he had a *LEGIT* freak-out. It was a rare freak-out. One bordering on dangerous. The man gave an arm-flailing, spittle-producing haranguing to two MSP employees who were very neatly stacking things at the counter of the otherwise deserted gate. They looked at the man with expressions that seemed to say to him: ‘We’re sorry sir, you’re screwed’.

That man was probably that flight’s plumber. That plane was probably going down right now, like the plane that I was on.

What happened next on board Pilgrim Airlines Flight 6785 midway between Minneapolis and Houston was, without contest, the most courageous moment of my life. I pressed the call button above my head to beckon a flight attendant to where I sat in row 19, seat C (an aisle seat in an exit row with a little extra legroom). Half a millisecond later, a flight attendant appeared panting at my seat side, red-eyed, bloodless in the face. She was wearing rhubarb colored lipstick and a Betty Boop broach (an accessory of which I speculated, even in that moment, was a long shot to be approved in the airline’s guidelines

for Proper Flight Crew Attire). I sat up ramrod straight, eyed her squarely and said:

‘Ma’am, I think we’re out of luck.’

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

‘I don’t think there’s any plumbers on this plane.’

‘Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.’

‘Now, I want to make this clear,’ I said. ‘I am not by any means a plumber. But I want to be of help.’

The flight attendant looked me up and down with hesitation. Precious seconds gone to waste. Her pause did not help me to invigorate the inner confidence that I was trying so hard to summon. Her lips were quivering. She was immensely panicked. So was I.

‘*WE HAVE A PLUMBER!*’ she said, finally, her eyes welling up with hope.

‘Ma’am,’ I said, making an earnest attempt to correct the record, ‘I am not actually a—’

‘*MAYDAY! MADAY!*’ said the pilot.

The plane turned over in a barrel roll. For a moment too long we we were flying completely upside down. When the plane at last rolled back over on its belly, the next I saw of the flight attendant she was sitting against the closed door of the cockpit, hair frazzled, entirely out of sorts. I stuck my head into the aisle to meet her gaze. On her lips I could read that she was pleading: ‘Help.’

As the plane whipsawed left and right, my mind underwent a whole flood of past feats over which I’d witnessed plumbers triumph: I thought of how every

plumber I'd ever had the privilege to observe had approached whatever problem they confronted with an air of expertise and dignity. I thought of how plumbers so effortlessly made an art of wielding tools that I could not name. And of how they always had a knack for finding the simplest fixes for things that I was wont to overcomplicate.

More turbulence. Wretched fear. Pandemonium. Screams.

Now was time to draw upon the scattered, slipshod storehouse of all the plumbing related knowledge that I'd amassed throughout my life. I thought of a prodigious hairball that I, myself, without having to call a plumber, had removed from a bathtub drain; of an old kitchen sink that I'd demolished with a sledgehammer; of the time I took a tour of a sewer. I had a flashback to an oddball summer job when I cleaned porta-potties for extra cash, and another of the time I saved a kitten from a well. There is no knowledge I've encountered that is useless. No experience has gone to waste. My life has been such that I've flushed nothing down the toilet.

I rose from my seat to a scattered applause. Yes, people were actually clapping. (Those who were not sobbing.) The seatbelt and no-smoking lights were on. Then the plane freefell a good ten-thousand feet.

'BRACE! BRACE! BRACE!'

I was thrown against the ceiling for what felt like an eternity. A moment of serenity in the midst of disarray. When the plane at last regained its thrust

ahead, I was thrown from the ceiling to the floor like a ragdoll, clipping my leg on an armrest before I landed in the aisle (which had become profusely littered with unsecured projectiles).

'SIR, WE NEED YOU NOW!'

The emotional support dog had started barking and was not emotionally supporting anyone at all. All was terror and confusion. I pulled myself up from the floor, with great effort, and stood with my feet outspread in attempt to lower my center of gravity. Out a window, I could see the ground was drawing nearer.

As I began to shuffle and limp towards the rear lavatories, I tried to visualize the plane's schematics; how its pipes had been arranged, potential hazards (bio, mechanical, technical, et cetera), what not to touch, et cetera, what conceivable faults in this plane's plumbing could be leading to its systematic failure and on and on. I simply had to do it. There was no one else who could. I took a few more painful steps and then I stopped.

The rear port and starboard lavatory lights were switching from red to stoplight green in tantalizingly sporadic flickers. I stopped each time they turned to red and gripped the seatbacks beside me, fearing that the plane again would plummet. The conundrum of whether the rear two lavatories were occupied or not vexed me as I made my way back row by row, a mystery upon the same order as Schrödinger's confounding cat. Each time the lights turned green, I

scampered onwards as many steps as I could manage.

At row 24, when the lights turned red, I took a pause and looked out a window, out past a sputtering wing-mounted turbo jet fan. Beyond it were numerous townships spread across the earth, like cells with organelles. I could see the roads that were leading into them, like arterial networks, the veins of water threading through them, the geometries and structures that formed around specific geologic availabilities. Somewhere out there in that beautiful unrivaled land, there was an actual plumber who could save this plane; someone who had apprenticed and was lawfully certified; someone who was a *real* plumber and not a poser plumber, like how I was in that moment.

But what good would the world's best plumber be if they weren't on this flight right now?

'Can you save us?' said a volleyball player in row 25, seat B.

I took another step, determined.

'Thank you for your service,' said the frightened magician, who was sitting in row 26, seat D.

I told him frankly, 'Sir, I'm not a plumber.'

He grabbed me by the arm and pulled me in close and said, 'I will not fall for that illusion.'

In row 27, there was no one sitting in seat E.

In row 29, I saw someone that I knew. She looked at me with protruding eyes and said, '*I didn't know you were a plumber?!*'

The lavatory lights were locked ominously on red: Occupied. A dull light was shining through the thin cracks at the bottoms of the doors. More turbulence. I was thrown onto my back in the aisle between two Coptic priests. They leaned over me and said, 'Please save us, son. Our lives are in your hands.'

A flight attendant helped me up at row 31 and supplied me with a doggy bag and a rubber glove. I puked into the bag and then tossed the bag aside and donned the glove at once. The glove covered my arm all the way up to my shoulder, like the ones that farmers use to artificially inseminate cows. As I snapped the glove in place, I noticed that the Boy Scout who I'd seen playing with crucial dashboard buttons in the cockpit preflight was sitting in the very back row before the lavatories. The little boy wasn't wearing any shoes or socks. And he was eating Kung Poa Chicken, the smell of which was swelling into a thick molecular fog around the whole back half of the plane.

The pilot then made an announcement that was actually somewhat comprehensible (the first time such could be said for an announcement this whole flight). From what I could gather, he was advising anyone who was wearing high heels to remove them as soon as possible. He then explained that the heels would almost certainly puncture the inflatable slides that would deploy in the (now somewhat likely) event of a water landing. He said that his name was

‘Christian’ and that he was the ‘father of two beautiful daughters and husband to a remarkable wife’ before he went on to assure us that he’d been flying for Pilgrim Airlines now for over twenty-some-odd years. He had not quite reached the point of telling us precisely why he was disclosing this information (he had no need to tell us — we knew without him saying) when the oxygen masks came down. You could then hear him admitting to his co-pilot that in all his years of flying, he had never had the oxygen masks come down.

This last bit was the only fragment of an announcement that had come through the speakers clearly for the entire terrible flight. Looking back, in assessment, it’s safe to say that the whole crew had been speaking too closely into their microphones, a detail likely overlooked in trainings throughout the commercial aviation industry at large. If airlines could only have the prudence to include in their training modules minutiae such as this (i.e., that announcements are far more comprehensible when the half-rate microphones they’re spoken into are held a medium distance from the mouth), then perhaps we would not, that horrendous afternoon, have been subjected to whatever plumbing problem was bringing this plane down.

When I at last reached the rear port lavatory, the light was red; the door locked. I knocked.

‘Is anybody in there?’ I said.

I heard no reply.

As I stood there trying to think of what to do, I became aware that all on board were watching me, even the pilots, who had swung their cockpit door wide open. The plane then began a steep decline again, this time in a rapid corkscrew. I braced my arms and legs against the two rear lavatory doors and held myself as if a starfish as the plane plunged into a death spiral.

Now, I must interject here briefly — with me spinning in your mind's eye — for a very riveting discussion on in-flight lavatory history:

The first fully operational Commercial Airliner Toilet was installed in 1928 on board Britain's four-engine Handley Page .42 biplane. Before that, options were pretty limited. Prior to such contrivances as funnels and tubes (and countless other such trailblazing innovations — like Elsan toilets and piddle packs), pilots during long duration flights would acrobatically piss straight onto the floorboard. After Charles Lindbergh had landed in Le Bourget at the tail end of his pioneering transatlantic flight, he was questioned by King George VI on how he was able to manage. Mr. Lindbergh (one could imagine him rolling up his sleeves to say this) then enlightened His Royal Majesty on how, under a hole cut in his cockpit's wicker chair, he had inserted an aluminum can beneath him and then tossed whatever payload had accumulated overboard

once his Spirit of St. Louis had reached the overland of France. (It's safe to assume the U.K. King responded here with great delight.) While we're on it, unless you yourself are royalty, do not, under any circumstances, get a contemporary fighter pilot going on this subject. You are sure to stir up a Herculean rant. They will most likely go into a heated vexation on general cockpit discomfort before they explain to you how limited the options are for Long Range Underwear (aka, adult diapers), after which they'll take you headlong into too descriptive anecdotes on how difficult it is to take a leak when you're strapped into a catapultable cockpit eight ways to Sunday over a hot ballistic missile while you're wearing a G-suit over a flight suit that has a zippered-crotch-opening that is Too Small, and how under there, you have to somehow finagle yourself free (if you're a guy — there's no hope if you're a girl), sometimes in Arctic conditions, while hitting G-forces and pressure pockets and precarious fly zones that make the whole deal of in-flight relief just totally frustrating. Number two? It's either hold it or shit the saddle. And as far as this discussion goes as it pertains to spaceflight, it is in your best interest not to encourage an astronaut to wax poetic on this issue all the same. Just use your imagination. Zero gravity bowel and bladder movements are paradoxically quaint

and patently absurd when you really stop and think about it.

I was finding it extremely difficult to hold myself in place as the plane was spinning groundward. My hands and feet were slipping. Here and there, I was catching glimpses up the aisle of all 177 other passengers (and six crew) whose lives were depending on me. Every person was bracing in their seats, even the pilots, whose cockpit door was swinging open and closed. Beyond their windshield, I could see, intermittently, the little group of hills that we would soon be slamming into unless I could save this plane from plummeting.

The rear port lavatory light then clicked green. In bold letters above my head appeared the word *VACANT*. A baby's dirty diaper then flew back and smashed against my face. I flung it off and managed to open the door and pull myself inside. With this, the plane shook violently and then all went very still. We had (at least for the moment) re-established equilibrium.

I had stepped into the loneliest place I'd ever been in throughout my whole life; this windowless lavatory, suspended in the sky. At first, nothing in particular appeared to be out of working order. The entire chamber was unexpectedly clean and disinfected. The toilet then let out a great internal hiss, one so ferocious that I feared I would soon be sucked into it and spit out somewhere over Kansas.

I pressed the 'FLUSH' button to see if this would provide an easy fix, like restarting a computer before trying anything more complicated. Disconcertingly, there was no give to the 'FLUSH' button. Initially, my pressing of it did not cause the toilet to flush. This annoyed me. For a split second, I wondered if this might be the principal reason for the disaster now unfolding. But just as I was considering a fault in this button's mechanism to be the underlying problem leading to the plane's demise, the toilet flushed with such magnificent gusto that I had to plug my ears to protect my eardrums from bursting.

This was followed by a terrible toilet growl. Water bubbled up in suds and gurgles, causing a repulsive sludge to splash over the seat, wetting my shoes in the process and making the floor slippery.

Hastily, I performed a mental troubleshooting for any possible malfunction, running ill-informed diagnostics in my head. I scanned the walls to see if there was anything resembling a maintenance log, or at least some sort of indication that suggested sanitation. For instance, a sign that read: *EMPLOYEES MUST WASH HANDS*. I found nothing of the kind. This did not comfort me.

There was then a knock on the door.

'*IS EVERYTHING OKAY IN THERE?*' said a flight attendant.

'All fine,' I said. 'I'll be out in a minute.'

'*SIR, WE DON'T HAVE TIME!*'

I reached into the toilet with my ungloved hand.

This was stupid. I stopped and spun around so I could reach in with my gloved hand. This wasn't as easy as it sounds. The lavatory was an ergonomic disaster. So much so that it made it difficult to reposition. As I reached into the toilet with my gloved hand, I accidentally pressed the 'FLUSH' button with my forehead and flushed the toilet with my hand hooked down inside the toilet's throat. Blue sanitizing liquid splashed onto my face and on the ceilings and on the walls and mirror.

Fun fact: When a Boeing 737's toilet is flushed while grounded, it makes the same sound as it does when flushed at 30,000 feet. It's just as intense. Its force has nothing to do with altitude or cabin pressure or even which way is up or down. Learning this shocked me.

'HOW MUCH LONGER?' said a flight attendant. *'HAVE YOU EVER PLUMBED A VACUUM TOILET BEFORE?'*

'Ma'am, I have never plumbed a normal toilet before.'

'I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE A PLUMBER?'

'I did not!'

'OH MY GOD!'

I would have given anything right then for a lavatory window. Before I reached into the toilet's throat once more, I wanted to view the clear blue sky a final time.

'Mister Plumber, sir,' said the pilot over the inter-

com, his voice absurdly calm. 'If you don't fix this problem in the next... let's see here... ninety seconds, everyone on board is going to die.'

Everyone on board then screamed, including me.

I took a deep breath and tried to regain my composure. As I exhaled, I pictured all of the pipes in the world and the plumbers who had put them there. Pipe by pipe, plumbers had lain the very underbelly of our civilization. Without plumbers and the pipes they bared, we would all be swimming in a giant cesspool. I decided, at that moment, that if I were to live beyond the day, I would dedicate the remainder of my life to the plumbing of the sky. I would attend the next year's Toilet Expo in Beijing where I would submit a groundbreaking design that would eliminate all airline lavatory blunders ever. All airline lavatory systems would be ergonomically redefined; they would be manufactured with state-of-the-art material, assembled with closable windows and outfitted with 'FLUSH' buttons that *gave*. I would fill lavatory water tanks with Rocky Mountain spring water. I would humidify all lavatories with the most refreshing mountain mist. And I would hang short, inspiring maxims on the walls, like, 'Fortune belongs to the bold', 'Say yes to today' and 'Only you can unclog the pipes that are leading to your dreams.' But most importantly, I would hang signs throughout the main cabins of entire airline fleets that would serve to encourage a general atmosphere of comfort, luxurious sanitation and

security, like for instance, 'Don't fret, dear flier. You are safe with this plane's plumbing.' Passengers and crew alike would benefit enormously. It would spark a revolution. The world would be a more smoothly flowing place.

Multiple flight attendants were pounding on the door. Several alarms were ringing. The pilot hadn't noticed he'd left his microphone in the 'ON' position. Every word that he was saying could be heard and unmistakably understood by all throughout the cabin. (Apparently, without realizing it, he was actually holding his microphone a medium distance from his mouth.) This was Not For The Best. The pilot appeared to be concerned with a reading on his dashboard's safety sensor; specifically, a red blinking error code of which he'd never encountered throughout his twenty-some-odd years of commercial piloting experience. He ran the code through Air Traffic Control. Even they were stumped. It wasn't even in their database.

The pilot then said a desperate pilot prayer. When he said, 'Amen,' the plane again began to freefall.

Floating in the lavatory, I clung to the toilet and plunged my arm into its dark, dank mouth with as much force as I could muster. I did not expect the pipe's diameter to be so small. My whole being contorted like an ectoplasm as I tried to gain stability and leverage. At the length of about three-quarters of my forearm in, the pipe turned unexpectedly at a

ninety-degree angle. I shimmied my hand into it and tried to inch my fingers beyond the joint, but I could not reach in any farther.

The way I was suspended, I could see that I was floating upside-down in the lavatory mirror. I was reaching *up* to plunge the toilet. For a moment, I felt as if I'd become a disembodied spectator to the grand finale of my own life. This was it, I thought. I would either save this plane, or I, along with all 177 other passengers (and six crew) would soon be forcefully eliminated. In the mirror, the man I saw looking back at me was, for the first time I could recall, ablaze with purpose. Until that instant, I had never felt the sensation of knowing exactly who I was. That man I saw before me at last appeared to be at peace despite his circumstances. I had finally found the true calling of my life, my *métier*. Which was this: *I was the only person in the world who could save this plane from momentarily creating a crater in a cornfield.* That man in the mirror was looking back at me with eyes that were at long last filled with the self-knowledge of what I'd always been but never known: I was born to be a plumber.

A vital force ripped through me, fueling me to reach far deeper into the toilet's pipe than I would have ever thought was possible. I spread my legs to hold myself in place, pressing one foot against the ceiling and the other against the door. In this position, as the plane spiraled towards the ground, I reached into the toilet until I could truly reach no

more. I reached and reached until, finally, I felt something.

My rubber glove removed a critical range of tactile function. What I had come across at the tips of my outstretched fingers, I could still nonetheless discern. What I felt was a mass so dense and fibrous it was almost solid. I could tell, obscurely, that it was not organic material, but rather something that was made of a synthetic, like nylon, or polyester. I reasoned that perhaps when this something had lodged in the toilet's oblong pipe, it had produced a massive buildup of pressure that in turn had sprung a leak that was now wetting crucial wires. I managed to hook a finger onto the mass and pull it slightly towards me. I pinched the material and pulled it ever so gently towards me a few centimeters more.

I ignored the frantic inquiries coming from the flight attendants, who were pounding on the door. Though their shouts were as loud as they were desperate, I was the most focused on a task that I'd ever been before. I gave one more tug on the fibrous mass and *pullllllllled*. The object then dislodged with an inverted *PLOP*. This was followed by a cathartic gasp from the bowels of the toilet, the sound of which echoed resoundingly throughout the plane. With this, the toilet began to intensely suck again, like a harmony completed. I felt an exuberant spirit return to the loins of the aircraft; something like the reinstatement of a general well-being. A great smack then walloped the bottom of the fuselage and I was

thrown headfirst to the lavatory floor. We tore through the topmost branches of a hilltop forest before we made a steep ascent and began to rise steadily again. The pilot, at the very last moment possible, had regained control of the aircraft.

‘Ladies and gentlemen!’ the pilot said, ecstatic. ‘We are heading to Houston!’

There was vigorous applause. A chorus of *PHEWS* and *AHHHS*. The sudden lucid apprehension of all on board that their lifeblood was flowing freely. From the lavatory, I breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Pilgrim Airlines Flight 6785 was abuzz with joy and packed with passengers who were each enthusiastically confessing that they would never fly again. I remained in the lavatory for a moment still, dangling the polyester object before me of which I’d dislodged from the toilet. It was a very soiled tube sock.

‘Sir, is everything okay in there?’ said a flight attendant, lightly tapping on the door.

‘I’m fine,’ I said. ‘I’ll be out soon.’

‘Take all the time you need, sir.’

Though airline lavatories are indeed the loneliest places I’ve ever visited, there is something uniquely sacred about the moments they produce. Where else can one take a peaceful mile high whiz at 500 mph while simultaneously contemplating the fragility of life? What vulnerable spaces, these windowless lavatories, suspended in the skies...

When I opened the lavatory door, I was received with a standing ovation. A flight attendant (the one

of whom I'd previously informed, with special emphasis, that I was *not* a plumber) gave me a hug and offered me a can of complimentary soda. She lingered in my personal space for a moment too long and I did not know what to say or do so I booped her on the nose. (This was the flight attendant with the Betty Boop broach. Subconsciously, I think the reason I booped her was indirectly — nay, directly — related to my own internal linguistic association with the action of 'booping' to her Betty Boop broach.) After this, I turned and dealt a dreadful evil-eye to the barefoot-back-row Boy Scout and then I made my way back through the cluttered aisle to my seat in row 19.

When I got to my seat, there was a doctor sitting in it.

'Go sit in seat 1B,' he said, with great bravado. 'That is a seat reserved for First-Class Plumbers.'

My life has never been the same since (now that I'm considered one of society's elites). It's funny to think how quickly everything can turn over on its head, and for what perplexing reasons. Sometimes, I've learned, through trial and error, that it's better to look at it all upside down anyways. At least that's what I've been trying to do ever since I took this flight.

Which leads me to introduce to you *The Principle of Opposites*, the fundamental life philosophy under which I strive to live:

Most times, the only thing that makes any sense at all to me is the complete opposite of what it was that I initially considered. I try to learn all I can learn, and then I unlearn it, because I find out the opposite is true. And then I learn the opposite, and I unlearn that too, because if there's anything that has become clear to me in all my years of plumbing, it's that the world is always trying to make a hairball out of my current knowledge. I never know what tomorrow the pipe will bring.

The landing at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport was a smooth one. The plane stopped on the tarmac, then instead of hooking up to a Jetbridge, the ground crew wheeled up a shiny set of airstairs. All passengers stayed seated and did not move until I had disembarked. It was all very presidential. When I stepped onto the top step of the staircase, the Houston light was so bright that I could hardly see.

I had put on my sunglasses and descended halfway down the airstairs when the pilot appeared at the door of the plane.

'Sir, you just saved all lives on board this flight and we don't even know your name.'

When I turned around, all I could see was the pilot's silhouette.

'Who are you?' he said. 'We've lost the manifest.'

For the first time in my life, I told another soul who I really was and what I had been born to be.

‘I am The Plumber of the Sky.’

And then, like a Spartan Legion, all passengers and crew alike, from their seated ranks inside the cabin, roared out in thunderous assent: *‘ALL HAIL THE PLUMBER OF THE SKY.’*