# Home on another planet

Richard Bach

I had been up in the Clip-Wing, practicing a little sequence: loop to roll to hammerhead to Immelmann, for fun. I was pleased, that day, not to have fallen out of the Immelmann. The trick is full forward stick at the top of the thing, an awkward cross-controlled rudder and aileron for the first half of the rollout, finally reversing rudder to finish. It is not a comfortable figure to fly, but after a while one draws comfort from a good-looking maneuver instead of a pleasant ride. In times past people who have seen my Immelmanns have said, “Gee, you make an awful rollout.” I’ve had to explain that the Air Force never taught any negative-G maneuvers and so I’ve picked them up by myself and since my learning rate drags without some fanged instructor sitting back there I’m doing good to get the machine right-side-up by the time it’s ready to land.

I finished that, a reasonably good sequence with a fair Immelmann, flew around for a while looking out the open side of the cabin at the people down there at work and at school or driving about in tin-shell automobiles along roads barely wide enough to fit. Then landing, and in a moment the engine was as quiet as it had been fifty minutes earlier; a normal end to a normal flight. I got out of the airplane, tied the stick back, the ropes to the lift struts and tail, slid the rudder lock into place.

But then, right in the midst of all that everyday normalcy all at once I had the oddest feeling. The airplane, the sunlight, the grass, the hangars, the distant green trees, the rudder lock in my hands, the ground under my feet … they were foreign, strange, alien, distant.

This is not my planet. This is not my home.

It was one of the creepiest moments of my life, that happened for the first time as my hands fell awkward from the rudder lock.

This world seems strange because it is strange. I have only been here for a little while. My deep-secret memories are of other times and other worlds.

What an eerie way to think, I told myself, let’s snap out of this, son. But I wouldn’t snap. In fact, I remembered mists of this feeling, fragments of it after every flight I’ve made—the odd thought, returning to the ground, the buried conviction that this planet may be vacation or school or lesson or test, but it is not home.

I have come from another place, and to another place I shall one day return.

It was so absorbing, this odd thing, that I forgot to chock the tires before I left, and so earned a curse from me the next time I went to fly. The vacant numb who forgets to chock his tires, what good can he ever come to?

Yet the ghostly feeling has settled over me time and again since that flight in the Cub. I don’t know what to make of it, except that it might be true. And if it is true, if we are all passing through this planet for reasons of experience or learning or tests to pass, what does that mean, anyway?

If it’s true, it probably means don’t worry. It probably means I can pick up the things I’m so solemn and concerned about in this life and look at them with the eye of a visitor on the planet, and say, these don’t really touch me at all. And somehow, for me, that makes a difference.

I didn’t think I was the only visitor who has been stopped, rudder lock in hand or rolling through the top of an Immelmann turn, with this kind of harp-jingling shiver that there is a lot more going on than making an aircraft secure or full rudder against the aileron. I knew everyone who flies might have had this knowing, every once in a while, seen strangeness in a world that should by every press of logic be familiar and home.

Right I was. For one day, after a formation flight up over the summer clouds, which was admittedly a handsome sight, a friend said it himself.



“All this talk about going out to space—times like now I get the feeling I’m just coming in. Weird, you know, like I’m a Venusian or something. You know what I mean? That ever happen to you? You ever think that?”

“Maybe. Sometimes. Yeah, I’ve thought that.” So I’m not crazy, I thought. I’m not alone.

It happens more and more often to me now, and I must admit that it is not unpleasant to have roots in another time.

I wonder what the flying’s like at home.