Commercial passenger jets carry oxygen, life preservers, and seatbelts as matters of precaution. But how a seatbelt will save me should sixty tons of aluminum slam into the earth is a bit of a mystery. I’m afraid this seatbelt is just too similar to the one that I fastened at Farley’s Family Go Cart Track. Don’t ask.

The onboard flight tracking system—a courtesy to passengers for our transcontinental trips—is telling me that temperature outside is minus sixty-five outside and our altitude is 27,000 feet. And if the ice flakes in the Plexiglas mean anything, it’s cold out there. So if this plane depressurizes, not only will I be taking drop down oxygen, but a dropdown parka as well.

Unfortunately, depressurization advances more problematic concerns like, “the unlikely event of a water landing.” But the last time I checked, commercial aircraft remain unproven as container ships, and therefore necessitate quick exits. Nonetheless, I have formulated a plan for the “unlikely scenario” and it goes like this: find arm, find preserver, and find surface.

But these concerns and precautions are ultimately misguided and detract from what airplanes really need. Parachutes.

If the FAA is thinking in ‘just in case scenarios’, shouldn’t somebody pipe up at a meeting and say, “Hey, how about parachutes?” I can see the engineers pulling their snug number two pencils from behind their ears, scribbling a diagram on a napkin, and proclaiming, “By golly, Jimbo, get a three piece, you’re going straight to the top!”

In the meantime, passengers must manage without them. But imagine if planes did carry parachutes.

Statements like “Hi folks, I’m Captain Barry Fizzle. Lovely weather in Paris, uh, if we make it. That bang you heard was us hitting a weather balloon, so engine two is out and hydraulics are sluggish—but no need to panic, Greenland is a skip at 900 kilometers!” would have to include this aside: “Folks, there are those exit doors for all you D.B. Cooper types. Just remember, we’re over the Atlantic, so if you bail pack a wetsuit, a life raft, and a space heater.”

But perhaps I need to focus on the here and now. Because right now what irks me is that while I fidget in 34F, my counterpart in 2D is reclining comfortably, unconcerned and unaware of my expanding ankles and my unsought lotus position.

But let’s be honest. I’m jealous. They (the folks sitting in the single digits) get hot napkins, free cocktails, personal entertainment systems, and space. Meanwhile, I get space for a titmouse, overpriced cocktails, and pretzels.

Sometimes I imagine a scenario where their seats would be Lazy Boys with self-contained ejection systems. “In the unlikely event,” they would wait comfortably until the grim moment, and with a tug, not too unlike an F-16 pilot, explode into the ether as a tossed salad of passengers, cocktails, pretzels, and flat screened entertainment systems.

Of course, upon splashdown, they’d find a self-inflating pontoon boat equipped with all the amenities: wet bar, hot napkins, and OnStar.

“Don’t worry folks, we’ve notified the Carpathia, it should be there momentarily.”

Of course, it wouldn’t be the Carpathia, or even something as unaccommodating as a rusted freighter hauling Norwegian peat moss to Cleveland. No, it would be by the James Cameron film expedition getting footage for Titanic 2. On board, they’d find James and his entourage, be fed champagne and beluga, and cackle with a resurrected Jack Dawson. They’d be taken to Cameron’s onboard cinematheque, where they’d recline comfortably on leather love
sofas, watch uncut footage from the new film, and pooh pooh themselves for not having ejected earlier.

But perhaps what’s really important, I mean really important here, is that I’m just a bitter, cramped man sitting uncomfortably in 34F. And so, as I gallant my attention to a stewardess who is maneuvering deftly down the aisle, and who seems remarkably detached and unconcerned by the suffering around her (at least mine), I take out and flap my last piece of legal tender and make an impassioned plea.

“Another bottle of red, eh?”

“I’m sorry sir. We’re only taking exact change.”