



Airman's Odyssey

Antoine de Saint- Exupery

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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was a French aristocrat, writer, poet, and pioneering aviator. He became a laureate of several of France's highest literary awards and also won the U.S. National Book Award. He is best remembered for his novella *The Little Prince* (*Le Petit Prince*) and for his lyrical aviation writings, including *Wind, Sand and Stars* and *Night Flight*.

The 1931 publication of *Vol de nuit* (*Night Flight*) established Saint-Exupéry as a rising star in the literary world. It was the first of his major works to gain widespread acclaim and became the winner of the prix Femina. The novel mirrored his experiences as a mail pilot and director of the *Aeroposta Argentina* airline, based in Argentina.

On 30 December 1935, at 02:45 a.m., after 19 hours and 44 minutes in the air, Saint-Exupéry, along with his mechanic-navigator André Prévot, crashed in the Sahara desert. They were attempting to break the speed record in a Paris-to-Saigon air race (called a "raid") and win a prize of 150,000 francs. Both Saint-Exupéry and Prévot miraculously survived the crash, only to face rapid dehydration in the intense desert heat. Their maps were primitive and ambiguous, leaving them with no idea of their location. Lost among the sand dunes, their sole supplies were grapes, two oranges, a thermos of sweet coffee, chocolate, a handful of crackers, and a small ration of wine. The pair had only one day's worth of liquid. They both began to see mirages and experience auditory hallucinations, which were quickly followed by more vivid hallucinations. By the second and third day, they were so dehydrated that they stopped sweating altogether. Finally, on the fourth day, a Bedouin on a camel discovered them and administered a native rehydration treatment that saved their lives. The near brush with death would figure prominently in his 1939 memoir, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, winner of several awards, including the National Book Award.

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